

Diabetes Today

Eye Exams Can Help In Detecting Diabetes

(NAPSA)—Nearly 21 million Americans have diabetes and, perhaps of even greater concern, more than 6 million Americans are unaware that they have the disease. In addition to overall health complications, diabetes can cause changes in one's vision and ultimately lead to blindness. In fact, diabetes is the No. 1 cause of new cases of blindness among adults. The American Optometric Association (AOA) strongly encourages individuals to have regular, comprehensive eye examinations. Optometrists can serve as the first line of detection for diabetes, since the eye is the only place on the body where blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue.

According to the AOA's annual American Eye-Q™ survey, only 41 percent of Americans thought that diabetes patients should have their vision checked once a year.

"Individuals who are at high risk for diabetes need to have regular, dilated eye exams and all individuals with known diabetes need to have dilated eye exams each year," according to Robert C. Layman, O.D. "Fortunately, in nearly all cases, diabetic retinopathy, a potentially blinding complication of diabetes and sometimes the very first sign of diabetes, can be diagnosed during a dilated eye exam, in which drops are put into the eyes. Early detection of diabetes is critical in maintaining healthy vision."

If diabetes results in vision loss, a doctor of optometry can help patients regain their quality of life by maximizing remaining vision through low-vision rehabilitation.

More facts about diabetes:

- An estimated 54 million



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Americans ages 40 to 74 (40.1 percent of the U.S. population is in this age group) have prediabetes, a condition that puts them at high risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

- People with diabetes are 40 percent more likely to develop glaucoma.
- People with diabetes are 60 percent more likely to develop cataracts.

Individuals at risk should have an eye examination annually or as recommended by their optometrist. Contact a doctor of optometry immediately if your vision becomes blurry; you have trouble reading signs or books; experience double vision; feel pressure in your eyes; encounter straight lines that appear indistinct; or your side vision is limited.

Diabetes risk factors include age, obesity, physical inactivity, a family history of the disease, medical history of gestational diabetes and impaired glucose tolerance.

Healthy vision doesn't happen by accident. Regular eye exams are essential in maintaining eye health and can also contribute to good overall health.