

Info sheet:

Diabetic retinopathy

What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye disease caused by diabetes, including Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. It affects the small blood vessels of the retina at the back of the eye.

Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent up to 98 per cent of severe vision loss.



Normal vision

What are the symptoms?

- It often has no symptoms in the early stages. So changes in vision may not be noticed until the condition is serious.
- Vision may become hazy or blurred. Objects may float across the field of vision.
- Central vision may become distorted. Straight lines may appear bent or wavy.
- Fine details may become hard to see during everyday activities.



Example of how diabetic retinopathy may affect vision

Who is at risk?

- All people with diabetes are at risk.
- People who have had diabetes for a long time are at higher risk. Almost three out of four people who have had diabetes for 15 years or more have some form of diabetic retinopathy.
- People whose diabetes is hard to control and those who have high blood glucose ('blood sugar') levels over a long period of time.

- Indigenous Australians are 14 times more likely to develop the condition than non-Indigenous Australians.
- Women with diabetes who are pregnant.

What can be done?

- Have an eye test with an eye health professional (optometrist or ophthalmologist):
 - When first diagnosed with diabetes. This eye test should include a check of the retina.
 - Every two years thereafter (once a year for Indigenous Australians) or more often, as directed by an eye health professional.
 - Immediately if you notice a change in vision.
- Maintain healthy blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Your GP can assist with this.
- Maintain a healthy diet and active lifestyle.

Eye tests are essential to detect diabetic retinopathy early. Don't wait for symptoms, have regular eye tests. **Save Your Sight – Get Tested**

For more information

- Speak to an eye health professional or GP. Diabetes specialists and diabetes support groups can also give you information.
- Contact Diabetes Australia on 1300 136 588 or visit www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
- Visit www.visioninitiative.org.au

A Medicare rebate is available for most optometry services. You do not need a referral to see an optometrist. If required, your GP or optometrist can refer you to an ophthalmologist.

There are services and supports to help people adjust to vision loss, remain independent and continue to take part in their chosen activities. Speak to an eye health professional or your GP to find out more.



A partnership promoting eye health and vision care



Vision 2020 Australia acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government

February 2018