

## DIABETES & THE EYE

Of all the people in Australia who have been diagnosed with diabetes, the same number have the disease but do not know about it.

### POTENTIAL TO CAUSE BLINDNESS

Initially diabetes can cause fluctuations in the focus of the eye.

Long term diabetes can then cause untreatable damage to the retina (the light sensitive layer at the back of the eye). These changes are called retinopathy. The high blood sugar in diabetics causes the blood vessels in the retina to swell and leak blood, damaging the retina. Generally, diabetic retinopathy doesn't develop until the patient has been diabetic for at least 10 years.

*Diabetes  
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People with diabetes may also experience double vision, glaucoma or cataract.

**Retinopathy** is an inflammation of the retina. This occurs when diabetes damages retinal blood vessels and leads to swelling, bleeding and leaking of other fluids. 30% of all diabetics already have retinal damage and this may be quite advanced in one eye before the patient notices.

**Glaucoma**, a condition in which vision nerve cells are damaged, is more common in diabetic patients and can cause blindness if left untreated.

**Cataract** is a cloudiness forming in the lens within the eye and tends to occur at a younger age for diabetic patients.

### IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR CHECKUPS

Optometrists check for diabetic eye disease in a routine eye examination. These checks are even more important for known diabetics.

### TREATMENT OF DIABETIC EYE DISEASE

Diabetic retinopathy can range from minor to serious. In the more critical forms (proliferative retinopathy) it may be necessary for a patient to be referred to an eye surgeon for laser treatment. This seals off the leaking blood vessels and serves to stop or reduce further damage, but cannot reverse the sight loss that has already occurred. However, the best treatment is early detection.

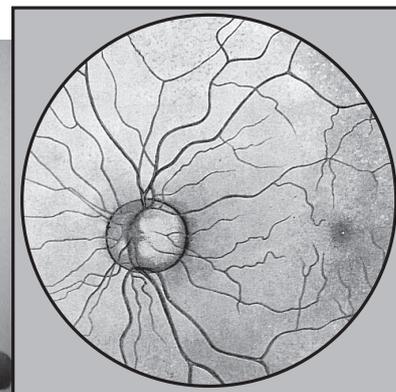
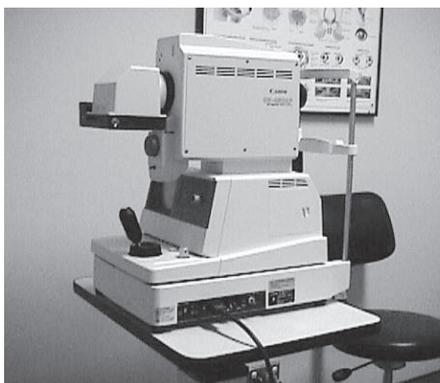
### REGULAR CHECK-UPS

All people should have a routine eye examination every two years, but diabetic patients should be checked every year and those with retinopathy will need to consult even more often.

The regular eye examinations for diabetic patients will often include digital images to document the condition of the retina.

If a diabetic patient notices any change in their vision, they should seek professional care immediately.

*Diabetics should have  
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*Digital retinal images are important for monitoring changes*