

## American Indians/Alaska Natives at Increased Risk of Developing Diabetic Eye Disease

*Diabetes disproportionately affects American Indians and Alaska Natives*



Today, diabetes affects more than 29 million people in the United States or over 9 percent of the population. In addition, another 86 million American adults, more than one out of three individuals, have pre-diabetes, a condition that puts people at increased risk for diabetes. In fact, these statistics include many groups of American Indians and Alaska Natives. According to the Indian Health Service, almost 16 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives have diabetes. Among them, diabetes varies considerably in various regions, from 6 percent among Alaska Natives, to 24 percent among American Indians in southern Arizona. All people with diabetes, both type 1 and type 2, are at risk for diabetic eye disease, a leading cause of vision loss and blindness.

- People with diabetes should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year to detect diabetic eye disease in its early stages.
- Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in adults 20–74 years of age.

Diabetic eye disease refers to a group of eye problems that people with diabetes may face as a complication of the disease and includes cataract, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma. Diabetic retinopathy, the most common diabetic eye disease, is the leading cause of blindness in adults 20–74 years of age.

“The longer a person has diabetes, the greater is his or her risk of developing diabetic eye disease,” said Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., director of the National Eye Institute (NEI). “If you have diabetes, be sure to have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year. Don’t wait until you notice an eye problem to have an exam, because vision that is lost often cannot be restored.”

Diabetic eye disease often has no early warning signs, but it can be detected early and treated before vision loss occurs. If you have diabetes in your family, you can leave a legacy of healthy vision by taking steps to prevent vision loss—get a comprehensive dilated eye exam.

“In fact, with early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care, people with advanced diabetic retinopathy can reduce their risk of blindness by 95 percent,” adds Suber Huang, M.D., M.B.A., chair of the Diabetic Eye Disease Subcommittee for NEI’s National Eye Health Education Program.

Research has shown that when people with diabetes maintain good control of blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol, they can slow the development and progression of diabetic eye disease. In addition to having a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year, people with diabetes should do the following to keep their health on **TRACK**:

- **Take** your medications.
- **Reach** and maintain a healthy weight.
- **Add** physical activity to your daily routine.
- **Control** your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol.
- **Kick** the smoking habit.

If you have diabetes, set your sight on healthy vision. Schedule a comprehensive dilated eye exam. For more information on diabetic eye disease and tips on finding an eye care professional or financial assistance for eye care, visit [www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes](http://www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes) or call NEI at 301–496–5248.

*The National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the National Institutes of Health, leads the federal government's research on the visual system and eye diseases. NEI supports basic and clinical science programs that result in the development of sight-saving treatments. For more information, visit [www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov).*

*NEI supports more than \$45 million in diabetes research and outreach, including the Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research Network (DRCR.net), a collaboration of more than 300 physicians at more than 100 clinical sites across the United States.*

*About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the Nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).*

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