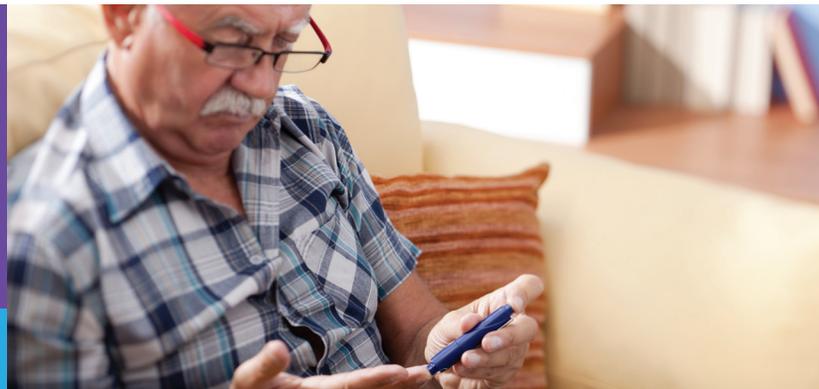


Educating Older Adults About Diabetic Eye Disease

Tip Sheet



Diabetes is an epidemic in the United States. In the past 30 years, the number of adults diagnosed with diabetes has increased by more than 150 percent.¹ Diabetes can cause many health problems, including vision loss and blindness. The longer a person has diabetes, the higher his or her risk is of getting diabetic eye disease, yet half of all people with diabetes don't get annual comprehensive dilated eye exams. Start the conversation about diabetic eye disease so you can help people with diabetes protect their sight.

What Is Diabetic Eye Disease?

Diabetic eye disease refers to a group of eye problems people with diabetes may face as a complication of this disease, which can lead to vision loss and blindness. These include—

- **Cataract:** Clouding of the lens of the eye
- **Diabetic retinopathy:** Damage to the blood vessels in the retina, the light-sensitive tissue in the back of the eye
- **Glaucoma:** Increase in fluid pressure inside the eye that leads to optic nerve damage and loss of vision

To help prevent vision loss and blindness, it's important for people with diabetes to have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year to detect diabetic eye disease early and to keep their diabetes under control.

What Are the Symptoms of Diabetic Eye Disease?

Diabetic retinopathy is the most common of the diabetic eye diseases. It often has no early

symptoms; however, less than 10 percent of adults ages 65 and older in the United States are aware of this.² It is vital they be informed that diabetic retinopathy can cause vision loss that usually cannot be restored but that vision loss can be prevented or minimized with early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care.



Tip Box:

To help older adults reduce their risk of vision loss and blindness, encourage them to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam every year and to control their diabetes by—

Taking their medications.

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.

Adding physical activity to their daily routine.

Controlling their blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol.

Kicking the smoking habit.



National Eye Institute



A program of the National Institutes of Health

Older Adults, Diabetes, and Diabetic Retinopathy

Vision loss and blindness are not a normal part of the aging process, however, as people with diabetes age, they are at an increased risk for eye disease, especially diabetic retinopathy. More than 11 million, or more than 25 percent, of all people 65 years of age and older have diabetes,³ and more than 3 million adults ages 65 and older have diabetic retinopathy.⁴

Older Adults and Health Care

Many older adults have concerns about paying for eye exams, and some treat eye problems using natural medicine and home remedies.⁵ Help protect the sight of older adults by sharing science-based information with them.

What You Can Do

As a health or community-based professional, you can guide, motivate, and encourage older adults with diabetes to protect their vision. Please visit the National Eye Institute (NEI) Publications Catalog (<https://catalog.nei.nih.gov/>) and download diabetic eye disease resources (available in English and Spanish) for your discussions. These resources can help you raise awareness about how older adults with diabetes can protect their sight.

Help the National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP) spread the word:

- Discuss the relationship between diabetes and vision with your patients or those you serve.
- Have copies of NEHEP resources available and share them in your office.
- Post or tweet the following call to action on your Facebook and Twitter sites: Everyone with diabetes needs to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year.
- Host a health-related event at your location, at a local health fair or senior center, or in a place of worship, and speak about diabetic eye disease and the importance of healthy vision. Remind older adults that people with diabetes need to have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year.
- Share information about financial aid for eye care.

- Take extra time to answer questions during health appointments (if you are a healthcare provider) and make sure patients understand their role in maintaining healthy vision. If a caregiver or family member is with them, please make sure that he or she understands the information you provide.

Diabetic Eye Disease Resources



- **Diabetic Eye Disease: An Educator's Guide**—This patient education tool for health professionals and community-based educators is a desktop flipchart, with text and illustrations to help guide discussions with people who have diabetes.



- **Don't Lose Sight of Diabetic Eye Disease**—This brochure provides information about diabetic eye disease and what people can do to prevent vision loss.



- **Diabetes and Healthy Eyes Toolkit**—This educational toolkit provides community health workers and health promoters with information and tools to help them educate people about diabetic eye disease in small group settings.



- **Medicare Benefit Card**—This card promotes the glaucoma and diabetic eye disease benefit under Medicare and describes eligibility requirements.



- **Financial Aid for Eye Care**—This handout lists state and national resources that regularly provide aid to people with vision problems.

Other Diabetic Eye Disease Resources

NEHEP provides additional resources you can use year round on your website, in your newsletter, or with any other educational or outreach efforts.

Check these out at www.nei.nih.gov/nehep/programs/diabeticeyedisease

- Diabetic eye disease education website
- Drop-in articles
- Infocards
- Print public service announcements
- Social media messages
- Videos and animations
- Web banners

Join us!

Together, we can make a difference. We look forward to working with you to help people with diabetes protect their sight.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Crude and Age-Adjusted Percentage of Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Adults With Diagnosed Diabetes, United States, 1980–2011*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2013. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/statistics/prev/national/figageadult.htm>

² National Eye Health Education Program et al. *2005 Survey of Public Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to Eye Health and Disease*, 2005. Bethesda, MD: National Eye Institute.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *National Diabetes Statistics Report: Estimates of Diabetes and Its Burden in the United States, 2014*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2014. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/statsreport14/national-diabetes-report-web.pdf>

⁴ National Eye Institute. *2010 U.S. Prevalent Cases of Diabetic Retinopathy (in Thousands) by Age, Race/Ethnicity*, 2012. Available at <https://www.nei.nih.gov/eyedata/diabetic.asp#3>

⁵ National Eye Health Education Program. *Summary Topline Report #17: Older Adults Combined*, 2011. Unpublished. Bethesda, MD: National Eye Institute.

For more information on diabetic eye disease, visit

www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes

or call NEI at 301–496–5248.



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