

For information about diabetes (including information about diet), contact Diabetes Australia on 1 300 136 588. Diabetes Australia has printed information available in many languages.



English
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[ENG]

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

Don't let diabetes steal your sight

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NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Don't let diabetes steal your sight

About 400,000 people in Australia and any of whom feel reasonably healthy are unaware they have diabetes, a disease which threatens their eyesight. Symptoms of diabetes aren't always obvious, and if it goes unnoticed and untreated, it can eventually lead to blindness (and other serious health problems). It's to blame for ten per cent of blindness in Australia and is the most common cause of blindness in people under 65. But this loss of sight is preventable.

Who's at risk of diabetes?

Anyone may be at risk. Type 1 (which always requires insulin injections) is most common in children and young people, although it can occur at any age. But most people with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes which is more likely to develop in adults over 40, and has a lot to do with the way we live our lives. Anyone who is over 40, who is overweight, or has a family history of diabetes or who has given birth to a baby weighing more than 4kg is at increased risk of diabetes. People from certain ethnic groups also have a higher risk, including people from Southern European, Chinese, South East Asian and Indian backgrounds.

How does diabetes affect the eyes?

When someone has diabetes their body cannot control the level of sugar in the blood. If this isn't **treated**, high levels of sugar can eventually lead to kidney disease, problems with the nerves which may result in amputation of feet or legs, and contribute to heart disease and stroke. It also damages tiny blood vessels in the eyes, causing a problem known as retinopathy. But because the symptoms aren't always obvious, the damage can become quite serious even before you realise something is wrong. This is why it's so important to have regular eye examinations. Everyone who has diabetes should

have their eyes checked at the time the disease is diagnosed, then every two years by someone trained to detect retinopathy (an ophthalmologist, optometrist, nurse, diabetes specialist or GP). Anyone who has retinopathy should have their eyes checked at least every 12 months. If the problem is detected early enough, treatment with laser surgery can usually prevent further damage to your sight. (Laser surgery uses a very concentrated beam of light to treat areas damaged by retinopathy.

What helps prevent retinopathy?

Controlling blood sugar levels by following the diet recommended by a doctor or dietician, regular exercise, medication as directed, and regular eye checks. Enjoying plenty of cereals, grains, vegetables and fruit, reducing fat in your diet, and exercising regularly not only helps control diabetes, it also helps prevent problems with cholesterol and blood pressure - healthy cholesterol and blood pressure levels are also important for preventing retinopathy.

How do I know if I have diabetes?

Although some people notice increased thirst and urination, lack of energy, blurred vision and frequent skin and vaginal infections, there may be no symptoms. The only way to be sure is to ask your doctor for a simple blood test. Anyone who is overweight, over 40, has a family history of diabetes or has given birth to a baby weighing over 4kg should have the test as soon as possible. If diabetes is detected, it can usually be controlled with a healthy diet, regular exercise, not smoking, and reducing alcohol intake. In some cases, insulin injections or tablets are needed to control this type of diabetes too.

How can you reduce the risk of developing diabetes?

By keeping to a healthy weight, reducing the amount of fat in your diet and being physically active.