

Diabetes: Eye Exams



A dilated eye exam lets your eye doctor see the back of your eye. This test can detect eye problems like diabetic retinopathy. Before the test, your eye doctor will use eyedrops to widen, or dilate, your pupils. This makes it easier for the doctor to see into your eye. The eyedrops take about 15 to 20 minutes to fully dilate your pupil. Your doctor may also use eyedrops to numb your eyes.

Who should get a dilated retinal exam?

Everyone with diabetes should have regular dilated retinal exams. Diabetes can lead to eye problems that cause vision loss or blindness. The longer you have diabetes, the more likely you will have eye problems. By the time you notice any vision problems, your eyes may already be seriously damaged. A thorough exam can help detect symptoms early. Early treatment may help protect your vision.

People with diabetes are also at a higher risk for glaucoma. This is increased pressure inside the eye, which can cause blindness. An eye exam can check for this condition along with diabetic retinopathy.

How often should you be tested?

If you have diabetes, get tested every year, or more often if your doctor says to.

If your eye exam results are normal, your doctor may consider follow-up exams every 2 to 3 years instead of every year. But if you are diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy, you may need frequent eye exams.

Who performs a dilated retinal exam?

This test can be done by:

- **An ophthalmologist.**
Ophthalmologists are medical doctors who diagnose and treat eye problems, diseases, and injuries.
- **A licensed optometrist.**
Optometrists are health professionals who diagnose and treat vision problems and eye diseases. They also do routine vision testing and prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses. An optometrist is not a medical doctor, but rather a doctor of optometry (OD). Many optometrists can do your screening exams, as long as you do not have diabetic retinal disease.

Your family doctor may also look at your eyes. He or she will send you to an eye doctor for a more thorough test or treatment if needed.

What should you expect after a dilated retinal exam?

Dilating drops may make your eyes sting and cause a medicine taste in your mouth. Your eyes will have trouble focusing for up to 6 hours after

the test. Your near vision is usually affected more than your distance vision. Your eyes may be sensitive to light. Wearing sunglasses may help until the drops wear off. Do not drive for several hours after the test.