



## I am managing my diabetes well. Am I at risk of DR?

Yes you are. **Anyone** with diabetes can develop DR.

- It is estimated that one in every four people with diabetes already has the condition.
- Although keeping your blood glucose level in your target range is very important, many other factors affect your risk of DR such as blood pressure and cholesterol.
- The longer you have diabetes the more at risk you are of DR.
- The **good news** is there are things you can do to reduce your risk.
- Having a diabetes eye health check and treating DR early can prevent severe vision loss.

*"I didn't know I was at risk. My independence is very important to me. I don't want to rely on people to do things for me, take me places. What can I do to protect my sight?"*

## Protect your sight for life

For more information on eye health and diabetes management

- Visit [diabetesvic.org.au](http://diabetesvic.org.au), or call the NDSS Helpline on **1300 136 588**
- Multilingual infoline **1300 801 164** [multiculturalportal.ndss.com.au](http://multiculturalportal.ndss.com.au)



## To find an optometrist in your area

- Scan the QR code to download the free Diabetes Australia app
- Visit Optometry Australia [www.optometry.org.au/find-an-optometrist/](http://www.optometry.org.au/find-an-optometrist/)



## Book a diabetes eye health check now



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# Who is looking after your eyes?

## Your guide to preventing vision loss from diabetes eye disease

## What is diabetes eye disease?

### Diabetes eye disease is also called Diabetic Retinopathy (DR).

It is caused by having high blood glucose levels over a long time. Other things that increase your risk of DR are high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

DR damages the tiny blood vessels in the back of your eye. If left untreated, your vision can be affected.

The **good news** is this leaflet provides the information you need to help **prevent** vision loss from DR.

### Will I know if I have DR?

You may not know. In the early stages, DR **has no symptoms at all**. In the later stages, you may notice blurred, hazy or double vision or you may have sudden loss of vision.

**The only way to know if you have DR is to have a diabetes eye health check.**

*"You might have good vision, you might think that your eyes are absolutely brilliant and there's no issue. But in the back of your eye, there could be a problem with those little tiny veins that you don't realise."*



## Getting a diabetes eye health check is easy

- You don't need a referral from your GP. You can book an appointment directly with an optometrist. When you do, be sure to tell them you have diabetes.

## What is a diabetes eye health check?

- It is different to a standard eye check because it specifically looks to see whether diabetes is affecting your eyes.
- It is usually done by an optometrist who will take a photo of the back of your eye.
- Your optometrist will look at the photo to check the blood vessels at the back of your eye for signs of diabetes-related eye damage.

## What else do I need to know?

- A diabetes eye health check takes about 30 minutes.
- It may be free (bulk-billed) or there may be a small fee.
- Your optometrist may use eye drops which helps them to see the back of your eye. If you do have eye drops, they may be a little uncomfortable. The drops will also leave you sensitive to light, so bring your sunglasses and be prepared to wait a while for your vision to return to normal.

## What happens next?

- If they see any signs of damage to the back of your eye, your optometrist will either monitor it or arrange treatment with an ophthalmologist (medical eye specialist).

Either way, discuss your results with your GP or your diabetes specialist.

## Andrew and Suriya

Andrew, 68 years, diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 5 years ago.

*"Diabetes eye health checks are part of my regular diabetes maintenance which includes eyes, feet and everything in between. When the reminder arrives from the optometrist, I just say to myself 'Well, it's about time you had a check-up...'"*

*To me diabetes care is like servicing my car; go regularly, get everything checked and avoid problems in the future".*

Suriya, 66 years, diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 3 years ago.

*"For me, diabetes eye health checks are about reassurance and information. If I have a regular eye health check, I know what's going on with my eyes and I know if I need to take any action."*



## Andrew's advice to you

*"If I was telling someone that's just been diagnosed, I would be saying to them 'Don't wait to be told and don't wait until you notice changes, have a diabetes eye health check now.'"*

*Discuss with the optometrist what to expect, what you should be aware of and so on. I had a lovely optometrist and she really put me at ease."*

## What happens if I have DR?

- Your eye health professional will advise you of your treatment options.
- In the early stages, treatment may not be needed, but you may be asked to have eye health checks more frequently to monitor the DR.
- You **can** slow progression of DR by keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol as close to target as possible.
- If DR progresses, you may need to take tablets or have specialist treatment (usually laser therapy).

## What can I do to protect myself from DR and prevent vision loss?

### 1. Have a diabetes eye health check

Have a diabetes eye health check **when diabetes is first diagnosed** and then at least every two years (more often if recommended by your optometrist).

### 2. Treat DR early

Early treatment can prevent up to 98% of severe vision loss.

### 3. Follow your diabetes treatment plan which includes the diabetes ABCs.

**A** Average blood glucose (HbA1c) below 7% (53mmol/mol)

Every 1% (11mmol/mol) decrease in HbA1c lowers your risk of developing DR by 30–40%.



**B** Blood pressure below 130/80 mm Hg

Keeping your blood pressure at target slows progression of DR.

**C** Cholesterol at target

LDL cholesterol less than 2.0 mmol/L, triglycerides less than 2.0 mmol/L.