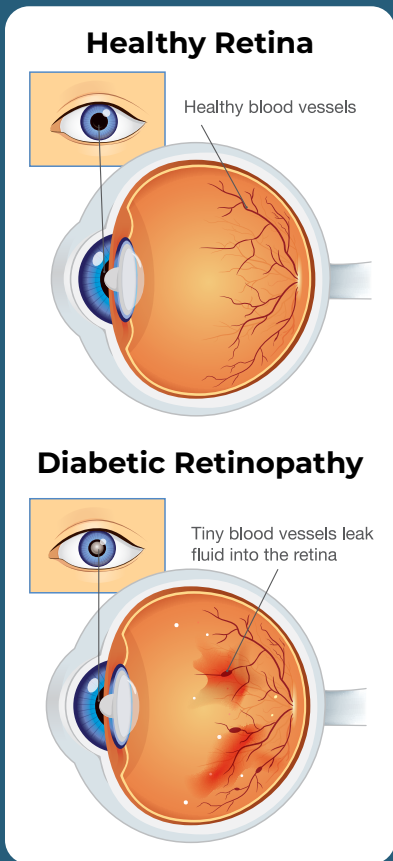


# Older Adults and Diabetic Retinopathy: Keep Your Vision on TRACK



## What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye condition that affects people with diabetes. Over time, too much sugar in your blood can damage the tiny blood vessels in your retina. These damaged blood vessels cause spots or blurry vision. If diabetic retinopathy is not diagnosed and treated, it can cause **blindness**.

It is a very **serious** condition.

## What You Should Know

**Older adults** are at greater risk for diabetic retinopathy. **WHY?**



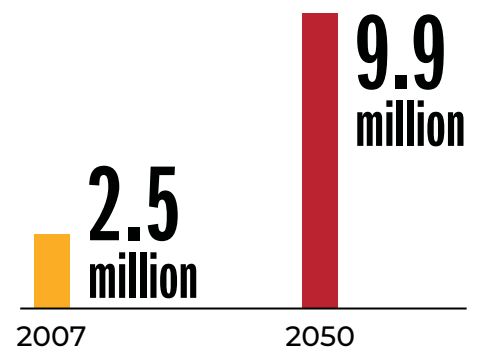
The **longer you have diabetes**, the greater the risk of diabetic retinopathy



**Uncontrolled diabetes** increases the risk of diabetic retinopathy

Older adults have had diabetes longer, which also means that they may have had uncontrolled diabetes longer and more frequently than younger people with diabetes. Both factors contribute to the increased risk of diabetic retinopathy.

The number of people older than 65 who have diabetic retinopathy is predicted to increase by 2050.



## Are There Other Aging Factors that Affect the Eyes? **YES** ✓

Everyone knows that aging effects the body. In general, there is 20% less blood flow to the retina. The retina also loses its thickness and can take longer to heal if injured. Although there are often **no symptoms** of diabetic retinopathy, some symptoms do include blurry or patchy vision, and seeing 'floaters.'



Blurred vision



Double vision



Patchy vision loss

Older adults may think new vision problems are only caused by getting older. It is crucial that you tell your doctor about any new vision problems and **get a comprehensive dilated eye exam** to identify the cause.



## How Do You Know if You Have Diabetic Retinopathy?

There are **no symptoms** in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. At later stages, in addition to blurry or patchy vision, it can cause blindness. The only way to know if you have diabetic retinopathy is to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam.

*The good news is you can take steps to help protect your eyesight.*

**95%**  
of severe vision loss from diabetic retinopathy **can be prevented** by early diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.

## What Is a Comprehensive Eye Exam?



A comprehensive dilated eye exam is more than a test of your eyesight, although that will be tested, too. The comprehensive dilated eye exam shows the physical state of the eye itself. You will need to see an optometrist or ophthalmologist who has special equipment to look into your eye and view your retina.

The doctor will place drops into your eyes to dilate (widen) your pupils, which makes it easier to see more of your retina. After your eyes are dilated, your doctor will take pictures of your retina to see if blood vessels are closed, broken, or leaking. Another test will show a cross-section of the retina to see if any fluid has leaked into the retinal tissue. The optometrist or ophthalmologist will be able to tell if you have diabetic retinopathy from the results of these tests.

### What You Can Do

Protect your vision by getting a comprehensive dilated eye exam every year. **Early diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up are key to maintaining your eye health and your vision.** You also need to manage your diabetes.

### Stay on TRACK

- T** Take your medications
- R** Reach and maintain a healthy weight
- A** Add physical activity to your daily routine
- C** Control your ABCs: A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels
- K** Kick the smoking habit

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- Isn't poor vision and poor eye health caused by getting older?
- How are diabetes and eye health related?
- Why is it important for me to get an eye exam?
- What type of eye care specialist should I go see?
- What kind of eye exam do I need?
- How often do I need an eye exam?
- Does Medicare pay for my eye exam?

