



But I'm still young. Am I at risk of DR?

Yes you are. **Anyone** with diabetes can develop DR, which is the leading cause of vision loss for people under 60 years.

There are over 40,000 Australians with type 2 diabetes who are under 40 years of age. More than 10,000 will already have DR.

- 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.

Lucas, aged 34, diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 2 years ago

"I didn't know that I was at risk. I'm a busy person and my family depend on me. I know I can't do all the things I do without my sight."

Protect your sight for life

For more information on eye health and diabetes management

- Visit diabetesvic.org.au, or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**
- Multilingual infoline **1300 801 164**
multiculturalportal.ndss.com.au



To find an optometrist in your area

- Visit Optometry Australia
optometry.org.au/find-an-optometrist/

Sign up for KeepSight

The KeepSight program will remind you when you are due for an eye check.

keepsight.org.au



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.

Jane, 25 years, diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 3 years ago

"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."



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.

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.

Jenny's story

Jenny, aged 36, diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 6 years ago

Before the diabetes eye health check

"I was scared. I was scared of what damage was done... of confronting the fact that my eyesight could be damaged, and of going through the exam and being confronted with what's there."

But I want to take care of my kids; I want to be able to see their children one day. I do want to be able to grow older and have my vision."

After the eye health check

"It was actually quite fun; I don't know why I put it off. I was really scared going in there, but definitely not now – I'm not fazed by it at all."

The eye drops were a bit uncomfortable and there was a small cost – but I think it's a wise spend considering what you're preventing."

Overall, it was worth it and the thought that I can control this gives me real peace of mind."



Jenny's advice to you

"I suppose 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 – book an 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, 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).