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# Diabetes? Keep an eye on your vision

The holidays are a great time for celebration, food and parties. It's time when friends and family get together to celebrate life and the spirit of the holidays. In the midst of all the celebration, some people need to be more careful about what they eat and drink. In particular, people with diabetes.

There are two types of diabetes mellitus; type I diabetes, also known as juvenile diabetes or insulin dependent diabetes, and type II diabetes, also known as adult onset diabetes or non-insulin dependent diabetes. There are 21 million people with diabetes in the US, of which 90 to 95 percent have type II diabetes. Some of the symptoms of diabetes include:

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Fatigue
- Changing or blurred vision

Diabetes is a condition that interferes with the body's ability to use and store sugar. Over time, diabetes causes a build-up of sugar in the blood stream. High blood sugar levels damage the normal blood vessels of the eye, resulting in two complications: macular edema and proliferative diabetic retinopathy. Not every diabetic patient develops diabetic retinopathy, however the chances of getting the condition increases the longer you have diabetes, particularly if the diabetes is poorly controlled.

Diabetic eye disease can commonly start with the following symptoms:

- Blurry central or peripheral vision
- Cloudy vision
- Double vision
- Blind spots
- Floating spots
- Flashing lights

There can also be no visual symptoms at all. Once diabetic retinopathy has been diagnosed by your eye doctor, laser and other surgical treatments can be used to reduce the progression of the condition and decrease the risk of loss of vision. In addition, the interior of your eyes can be photographed to provide more information to the eye doctor and establish a baseline appearance of your eyes for future reference and comparison.

Diabetic retinopathy can seriously affect vision and if left untreated, cause blindness. In fact, diabetic retinopathy has now become the leading cause of blindness in the US, affecting more than five million Americans. Recent studies reveal that as many as 24,000 people lose their sight every year to diabetes and diabetic retinopathy.



As a diabetic or pre-diabetic patient, or if you have a family history of diabetes, it is important that you take the proper steps needed to help prevent the progression of the diabetes and the development of diabetic eye disease. As a result, the first thing to keep in mind is the importance of a comprehensive dilated annual eye examination. This allows for the detection of any disease early, when eye problems are still preventable or when the disease is milder and easier to treat. In addition, you need to remember the following:

- Follow a proper diet
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid smoking
- Take your medication as prescribed by your doctor
- Maintain good sugar control by monitoring your blood sugar regularly
- Monitor your diabetic condition with your doctor regularly

By doing so, your chances are good that you can enjoy a lifetime of good vision and health. So, enjoy your holidays. Eat, drink and be merry; however, in moderation, especially if you are diabetic or are having any symptoms of diabetes.

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