

## Stay on **TRACK** To Prevent Blindness From Diabetes



### *American Indians and Alaska Natives Should Stay on TRACK To Prevent Blindness From Diabetes*

You can't feel it. You can't see it—until it's too late. Diabetic retinopathy, the most common form of diabetic eye disease, is the leading cause of blindness in adults age 20–74. It occurs when diabetes damages blood vessels in the retina.

Diabetic retinopathy affects 7.7 million Americans, and that number is projected to increase to more than 11 million people by 2030, including many American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Dr. Paul Sieving, director of the National Eye Institute (NEI), says, “Only about half of all people with diabetes get an annual comprehensive dilated eye exam, which is essential for detecting diabetic eye disease early, when it is most treatable.”

With no early symptoms, diabetic eye disease—a group of conditions including cataract, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy—can affect anyone with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. American Indians/Alaska Natives are at higher risk for losing vision or going blind from diabetes. According to the Indian Health Service, almost 16 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives have diabetes. Among them, diabetes varies considerably in various regions, from 6 percent among Alaska Natives to 24 percent among American Indians in southern Arizona.

The longer a person has diabetes, the greater the risk for diabetic eye disease. Once vision is lost, it often cannot be restored.

Keeping diabetes in control is key to slowing the progression of vision complications like diabetic retinopathy. There are important steps people with diabetes can take to keep their health on TRACK:

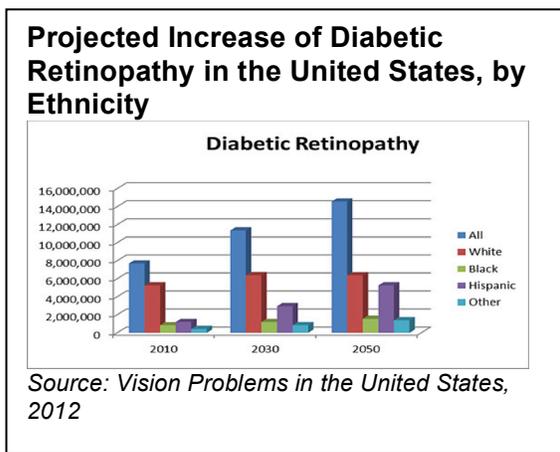
- Take your medications as prescribed by your doctor.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Add physical activity to your daily routine.
- Control your ABC's—A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels.
- Kick the smoking habit.

#### **Did You Know?**

- Diabetes affects more than 9 percent of the U.S. population.
- More than 1 in 3 people have prediabetes.
- Everyone with diabetes is at risk for diabetic retinopathy—the number one cause of vision loss and blindness in working-age adults.

Additionally, people with diabetes should have annual comprehensive dilated eye exams to help protect their sight. Early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care can reduce a person’s risk for severe vision loss from diabetic eye disease by 95 percent.

“More than ever, it’s important for people with diabetes to have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year. New treatments are being developed all the time, and we are learning that different treatments may work best for different patients. What hasn’t changed is that early treatment is always better,” says Dr. Suber Huang, chair of the Diabetic Eye Disease Subcommittee for NEI’s National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP) and member of the NEI-funded Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research Network (DRCR.net). “There has never been a more hopeful time in the treatment of diabetic retinopathy,” he adds.



Remember, if you have diabetes, make annual comprehensive dilated eye exams part of your self-management routine. Living with diabetes can be challenging, but you don’t have to lose your vision or go blind because of it. To help friends and loved ones reduce their risk, share this article.

For more information on diabetic eye disease, tips on finding an eye care professional, or information on financial assistance, visit <http://www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes> or call NEI at 301-496-5248.

**The National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), leads the federal government’s research on the visual system and eye diseases. NEI supports basic and clinical science programs that result in the development of sight-saving treatments. For more information, visit <http://www.nei.nih.gov>.**

**NIH, the Nation’s medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit <http://www.nih.gov>.**

Only half of all people with diabetes get an annual comprehensive dilated eye exam.

This exam is the only way to detect diabetic eye disease before vision loss occurs.

National Eye Health Education Program  
**NEHEP**  
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[www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes](http://www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes)

