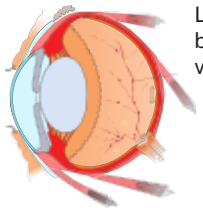
What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) occurs when blood vessels in the retina are damaged.

Who is at risk? According to Diabetes Canada, DR affects 23% of people with type 1 diabetes and 14% of people with type 2 diabetes.



Leaky blood vessels

23% TYPE 1

14% TYPE 2

An estimated 1,037,000 Canadians are living with Diabetic Retinopathy

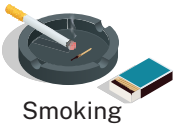
What are the risk factors for developing DR?



Poor blood sugar control



High cholesterol



Smoking



High blood pressure



Duration of diabetes

Symptoms

Diabetic retinopathy may cause no symptoms initially, but as the disease progresses, symptoms may include:

- Loss of central vision
- Blurry vision
- Flashes of light in field of vision
- Inability to see colours
- Black spots or holes in vision



How is DR diagnosed? DR is diagnosed through a comprehensive eye exam by your optometrist. The exam may include:

- Patient History
- Functional History
- Visual Acuity Measurements
- Colour Vision Evaluation
- Binocular Vision Assessment
- Eye Health Assessment
- Neurological Assessment
- Refractive Correction

How is DR treated?

In the early stages, DR can be managed by controlling blood sugar levels and blood pressure. However, as DR progresses, options to maintain vision include anti-VEGF injections, laser treatment or surgery. Early detection of diabetic retinopathy is crucial, as treatment is much more likely to be successful at an early stage.

How can DR be prevented?

- Monitor and maintain control of your diabetes.
- See your doctor regularly and follow instructions about diet, exercise and medication.
- See your optometrist for a **thorough eye examination** when you are first diagnosed with diabetes, and annually thereafter.

Reviewed: December 2025