



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
NOVEMBER 2010**

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EYES SERVE AS A WINDOW TO DIABETES DIAGNOSIS

Wisconsin Optometric Association reminds citizens to seek a comprehensive eye exam in honor of National Diabetes month

Nearly 23 million Americans are affected by diabetes. Yet, one-third of those do not know they have the disease. Left untreated, diabetes can have devastating effects on a person's eyes and vision, including total blindness. Because a comprehensive dilated eye examination is crucial to early detection and prevention of diabetes-related complications, optometrists serve on the front lines of diabetes care. In honor of National Diabetes Awareness Month this November, the **Wisconsin Optometric Association** reminds all citizens to seek a comprehensive dilated eye exam, performed by a licensed eye doctor, to maintain good eye and overall health.

"The eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue," Dr. Marcus Neitzke, Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) president, explains. "As a result, optometrists can detect many diseases that affect our blood vessels, such as diabetes, and seek treatment before they progress to something more serious."

"We are seeing a growing number of diabetes cases among people who, for one reason or another, do not actively monitor their diabetes risk," Dr. Neitzke explains. "The more people who develop diabetes and detect it at later stages, the higher likelihood they will experience serious vision complications."

Diabetic retinopathy is one such complication. The most common diabetes-related eye disease, and the leading cause of blindness among American adults, diabetic retinopathy is the result of damage to the small blood vessels located in the retina which is caused by diabetes. The retina is the light reflecting tissue in the eye. The blood vessels leak blood and other fluids causing swelling of retinal tissue and clouded vision. Symptoms of the disease may include fluctuating or blurring of vision, occasional double vision, night vision problems, and flashers/floaters seen by one or both eyes.

Often, there are no visual symptoms in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. Dr. Neitzke says this makes optometrists an important member of the diabetes health care team.

What should you do?

No matter if you have diabetes or not, **schedule a comprehensive eye examination** with an optometrist or another licensed eye doctor as a component of your overall health care, but especially if your vision becomes blurry, you have trouble reading signs or books, you see double, you feel pressure in your eyes, straight lines do not look straight, or your side vision (peripheral) is limited.

Other tips for maintaining healthy eyes and preventing diabetes include:

- Maintaining a healthy diet
- Exercising regularly
- Getting high blood pressure and blood sugar levels under control, as both can cause damage to blood vessels.
- Quit smoking

If you have already been diagnosed with diabetes, follow doctor's instructions for diet, exercise and check-ups. Part of living with diabetes and successful eye care is having a dilated eye examination on an annual basis – more often for those people with existing eye issues or more serious retinopathy.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association: *The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed and certified to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. The WOA also maintains an affiliation with the American Optometric Association (AOA). For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org*