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### THE EYES ARE A WINDOW TO DIABETES DIAGNOSIS

*In recognition of National Diabetes Awareness Month, the Wisconsin Optometric Association encourages citizens to schedule a comprehensive dilated eye examination with your optometrist*

For many, the month of November brings fall festivities and a treasured Thanksgiving holiday with family and friends. While we should be enjoying these events, it is crucial for Wisconsinites and citizens across the country to remember that November is also National Diabetes Awareness Month; a time to promote awareness of this prevalent and damaging disease. According to the 2011 National Diabetes Fact Sheet released to the public on January 26, 2011, an estimated 25.8 million children and adults in the U.S. currently have diabetes. However, it is estimated that out of this group, only 18.8 million have actually been diagnosed, leaving 7 million people unaware that they have the disease. Even more staggering is that approximately 79 million people in this country currently have "prediabetes," a condition identified when blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. Prediabetes can be determined with the fasting plasma glucose (FPG) test or the oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT).

According to Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) President and Green Bay area optometrist Dr. Lisa Slaby, "A comprehensive dilated eye examination is crucial to the early detection and prevention of diabetes-related complications." Doctors of optometry are primary eye care providers and, therefore, serve an important role in the care of a diabetic patient. The impacts of diabetes on a person's overall health, as well as the economic costs to the nation in medical services, are substantial. Diabetes, when left untreated, can also have incredibly damaging effects on an individual's vision and eye health. Therefore, member doctors of the WOA encourage all adults and children to help recognize the month of November as National Diabetes Awareness Month by visiting their local optometrist for a comprehensive vision and eye health examination.

"The eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue," explains Dr. Slaby. "As a result, optometrists can detect many diseases that affect our blood vessels, such as diabetes, which allows patients to 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," professes Dr. Slaby. "It's simple, the longer the condition progresses before it is diagnosed, the higher the likelihood the patient could experience serious vision and eye health complications."

One such complication is **diabetic retinopathy**, 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, or the light-reflecting tissue in the eye, caused by diabetes. The blood vessels leak blood and other fluids, causing swelling of the retinal tissue and clouded vision. Symptoms of the disease may include fluctuating or blurring of vision, occasional double vision, night vision problems, and flashes/floaters seen by one or both eyes.

Often, there are no obvious symptoms for the patient to recognize in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. Dr. Slaby says this makes optometrists' role even more important, as they provide a detailed examination of the eyes as part of their comprehensive care.

#### **What should you do?**

Regardless of whether or not you have been diagnosed with diabetes, **schedule a comprehensive eye examination** by a licensed eye doctor as a component of your overall health care regimen. This is especially crucial 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 if your peripheral (side) vision is limited.

Other tips for maintaining healthy eyes and preventing diabetes include the following:

- Maintain a healthy diet
- Exercise regularly
- Get high blood pressure and blood sugar levels under control, as both can cause damage to blood vessels
- Quit smoking

**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 634 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](http://www.woa-eyes.org).