

## THE EYES PROVIDE A WINDOW TO DIABETES DIAGNOSIS

*Schedule a comprehensive eye examination with a licensed eye doctor during National Diabetes Awareness Month*

**MADISON, WI** – November brings fall festivities and Thanksgiving celebrations with family and friends, and it is also a time to promote awareness of the prevalent and damaging disease known as diabetes. The impact of diabetes on an individual's overall health as well as the economic costs the disease places on the nation in terms of medical services for diabetic patients is substantial. While many are aware that diabetes affects a sizable contingent of the national population in the United States, many are also potentially unaware of the pivotal role eye doctors play in the diagnosis and care of the diabetic patient. The members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) encourage all adults and children to visit their optometrist for a comprehensive dilated vision and eye health examination to ensure the early detection of and the prevention of complications from diabetes.

Doctors of optometry are primary eye care providers that play an important role in the care of a diabetic patient. "A comprehensive dilated eye examination is crucial to the early detection and prevention of diabetes-related complications," advises Wisconsin Optometric Association President and Milwaukee and Madison area optometrist Dr. Kellye Knueppel. As Dr. Knueppel explains, "The eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue. 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."

If left untreated, diabetes can also have incredibly damaging effects on an individual's vision and eye health. "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. Knueppel. "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 significant complication is diabetic retinopathy, the most common diabetic eye disease and a leading cause of blindness among American adults, according to the National Eye Institute (NEI). Diabetic retinopathy is the result of damage to the small blood vessels located in the retina (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 flashers/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. Knueppel says this makes optometrists' role even more important because eye doctors provide a detailed examination of the eyes as part of their services rendered for comprehensive vision and eye health care.

### Protecting Your Vision

Regardless of whether or not you have been diagnosed with diabetes, WOA members encourage you to schedule a comprehensive eye examination with 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. According the American Optometric Association (AOA), Hispanic and African American populations are at greater risk for developing diabetic retinopathy, as are persons with medical conditions such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol. Pregnant women also face a higher risk of developing diabetes and diabetic retinopathy.

Additional steps 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 635 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).*