

# Future planning for diabetes-related eye conditions

EYE CONNECT



Macular  
Disease  
Foundation  
AUSTRALIA



If you have a diabetes-related eye condition but are not currently receiving treatment, it's natural to feel uncertain about the future. Planning ahead and knowing what to expect can help you feel more confident and prepared.

## The role of eyecare professionals in your care

When living with diabetes-related eye conditions, you may encounter several types of eye health professionals. Each plays a unique and important role in your care:

- **Optometrist**

A primary health care provider and often the first point of contact for people with eye or vision problems. Optometrists are trained to examine eyes, diagnose and

monitor eye diseases, and prescribe glasses or contact lenses. They can refer you to an ophthalmologist if further treatment or specialist care is needed. No referral is required to see an optometrist.

- **Ophthalmologist**

A medical doctor specialising in the diagnosis, management, and treatment of eye diseases, including diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular oedema. Ophthalmologists can perform eye examinations, prescribe medications, administer eye injections, perform laser treatments and surgery, and manage complex eye conditions. You will need a referral from your GP or optometrist to see an ophthalmologist. They often lead the eye care team and coordinate your treatment plan.

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### • **Orthoptist**

Usually works within the ophthalmology team. Orthoptists can test for and monitor the progression of eye diseases using specialised technology. No referral is required to see an orthoptist.

**Tip:** It's normal to feel overwhelmed when seeing a new eye health professional. Bring a friend or family member for support, take notes, and don't hesitate to ask questions or request written instructions.



## What to expect if you are recommended treatment for a diabetes related eye condition

It's normal to feel a mix of emotions such as worry, fear, or uncertainty if you are told you need treatment for a diabetes-related eye condition. Many people share these feelings, and support is available if you need it.

If your eyecare professional recommends treatment in the future, there are several effective options available. The most common treatments include:

- **Eye injections:** Medication is injected into the eye by your ophthalmologist to help reduce swelling and prevent further damage.
- **Laser treatment:** A laser is used by your

ophthalmologist to treat areas of the retina, helping to reduce the risk of vision loss.

- **Vitreotomy surgery:** In a small number of cases, surgery may be recommended to remove blood or scar tissue from inside the eye.

Before each procedure, your ophthalmologist will explain the reasons for treatment, answer your questions, and guide you through what to expect. After your procedure, ongoing care including follow-up appointments and support from your eye health team or the MDFA Helpline will help you manage your recovery and any concerns.

**Let's go through what to expect on the day for each of these procedures and preparations may differ depending on your ophthalmologist:**

## Step-by-step: What to expect from eye injections (intravitreal injections)

- **Before the injection:** Your eye will be numbed with anaesthetic drops and cleaned with an antiseptic solution to prevent infection.
- **During the procedure:** The injection is given while you are seated in a reclining chair or lying down in the clinic. The procedure is quick, usually just a few minutes. Most people feel little or no pain, usually a slight pressure or a brief sting.
- **After the injection:** Your vision may be a little blurry for a few hours. You won't be able to drive straight after the procedure, so arrange for someone to take you home. It's normal to have mild discomfort, redness, or to see moving spots or dark floaters for a day or two.
- **Ongoing treatment:** Treatment usually starts with monthly injections, but the interval between injections may increase as your condition stabilises or if a longer-acting medicine is used. Even if your vision improves, you may need to continue injections until your ophthalmologist advises otherwise.

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- **When to seek help:** Contact your ophthalmologist immediately if you notice increasing redness, pain, or sudden changes in vision after an injection. These could be signs of infection, which is rare but serious, and needs urgent attention.

### Step-by-step: What to expect from laser treatment (pan retinal laser photocoagulation)

- **Before the procedure:** Eye drops will be used to dilate your pupils, which may cause blurred vision for several hours afterwards.
- **During the procedure:** The treatment is usually performed in an outpatient clinic, or sometimes in your ophthalmologist's clinic. You will be seated at a special laser machine. Your ophthalmologist will apply laser spots to the retina, away from the macula, usually over several appointments. Most people tolerate the procedure well, though you may feel some discomfort or see flashes of light.

- **After the procedure:** Your vision may be blurry for a few hours, so you'll need someone to take you home, as you won't be able to drive. You may notice some mild discomfort or sensitivity to light for a short time.
- **Ongoing care:** Multiple sessions may be needed to complete the treatment. Attend all follow-up appointments to monitor your progress and discuss any concerns with your ophthalmologist.

### Step-by-step: What to expect from vitrectomy surgery





- **Before the surgery:** The procedure is usually performed in an operating theatre, often under local anaesthesia with sedation.
- **During the surgery:** The surgeon removes the vitreous gel (the clear gel inside your eye) and any blood or scar tissue from the surface of the retina. Laser treatment may also be applied during the operation. At the end of the procedure, the vitreous is often replaced with a temporary bubble of air or gas.

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- **After the surgery:** Your vision may be blurry for days or weeks while the bubble is absorbed. You'll receive instructions for postoperative care, including how to position your head if a gas bubble is used. You will not be able to fly or travel to high altitudes until the bubble has fully dissolved and your ophthalmologist lets you know it is safe to do so.
- **Ongoing care:** Attend all follow-up appointments to monitor healing and discuss any concerns. Your ophthalmologist will advise when you can resume normal activities.

Your ophthalmologist will discuss which treatment is best for you if, and when it's needed. If you have questions or concerns about any treatment, or would like more information, please contact the MDFA Helpline. Our team can provide support and help you understand your options.

## Checklist for managing diabetes-related eye conditions

-  **1. Regular Eye Exams** – Get your eyes checked regularly, even if your vision seems fine. Have your eyes examined at least every 12 months, or as often as your eye health professional recommends - even if your vision seems fine. Early diagnosis can help reduce the risk of vision loss.
-  **2. Manage Your Diabetes** – Keep your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol in check. Good diabetes management is key to protecting your vision.
-  **3. Watch for Early Signs** – Look out for changes to your vision, such as blurriness, spots, or floaters. Report any changes to your eye health professional promptly.
-  **4. Stay on Track with Your Health Plan** – Take prescribed medications and follow your diabetes management plan, even if you're not currently receiving eye treatment.
-  **5. Adopt Healthy Everyday Habits** – Eat well, be active, and avoid smoking. Healthy lifestyle choices support both your general and eye health.

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## Need more information?

Contact us today.

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