ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS

Optometrists: Your Partner in Diabetic Care



Optometrists play a central role in eye-related care of patients living with diabetes, as part of the broader diabetes care team. Their involvement spans screening, diagnosis, monitoring, management, support, referral and patient education, all aimed at preventing or minimizing vision loss and quality of life.

Annual and Ongoing Eye Screening

Optometrists conduct comprehensive eye examinations, including dilated retinal assessments and imaging (e.g., OCT), to screen for signs of diabetic eye disease such as diabetic retinopathy. These changes can be subtle or asymptomatic in early stages, making regular exams with retinal imaging essential.

Detection of Early Ocular and Systemic Signs

Because the retina's blood vessels are sensitive to changes caused by high blood sugar, optometrists can detect early vascular damage before vision loss occurs. In some cases, they may identify signs consistent with undiagnosed diabetes, prompting referral for medical evaluation.

Monitoring & Management

Once diabetic eye disease is detected, optometrists:

- Assess severity and determine appropriate monitoring intervals (often more frequent than annual exams for patients with changes).
- Manage mild to moderate disease through observation and supportive care.
- Identify progression that requires urgent specialist referral (e.g., to an ophthalmologist or retina specialist for laser, injections, or surgery)

Patient/Health Care Professional Education

Educating patients is a key function. Optometrists communicate findings to other health care professionals as well as help people with diabetes understand:

- The link between blood sugar and eye health/quality of life
- How often they should be examined
- What signs to watch for

Book Your Eye Exam

OHIP Coverage for Eye Exams

OHIP covers one annual major eye exam for people diagnosed with diabetes. The cost of retinal imaging is affordable and covered under most private insurance plans.