

## Men, vision health, and the big 5



Five of the most common health issues you face as a male can carry a risk of serious harm to your vision. Learn the ways your vision can be affected by each of these diseases, and what you can do to help avoid them.

### 1. Diabetes

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About 15.5% of men in the US have diabetes.<sup>1</sup> With this diagnosis comes a chance of developing retinopathy, a disease that results when high blood sugar levels damage the blood vessels in your eyes. It can cause the vessels to swell and leak, or to close off completely. Either way, diabetic retinopathy can harm your vision and result in blindness.<sup>2</sup> Diabetes also increases the risk of other serious vision conditions, such as cataracts and glaucoma.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Cardiovascular disease

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The heart distributes blood and oxygen to the areas of the body that need it. If you have heart disease, this flow can be disrupted, including the flow to your eyes. In fact, sometimes an initial diagnosis of heart disease is made by an eye doctor who notices the lack of blood flow during an eye exam.<sup>3</sup> The effects of heart disease can include temporary loss of vision and swelling in and around your eyes.

Heart disease also can lead to stroke, which can result in distorted vision, blind spots in your line of sight and loss of peripheral vision. Men are at higher risk than women of suffering a stroke that results in vision problems.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. High blood pressure

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There are many reasons why high blood pressure can damage your vision.<sup>4</sup>

It can damage the tiny blood vessels in your eyes and restrict blood flow to your retina, leading to blurred vision or blindness. It can cause fluid to build under your retina, which distorts and sometimes impairs vision. And if high blood pressure completely blocks the flow of blood to your optic nerve, it can kill the nerve cells and cause temporary or permanent vision loss. High blood pressure also can lead to stroke.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. High cholesterol**

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You may know that high cholesterol can lead to heart disease, but did you know it also can harm your vision? High cholesterol can restrict blood flow in your veins, including the veins in your eyes. When a retinal vein is blocked, it will hemorrhage and retinal vein occlusion (RVO) and vision loss can result. Causes of RVO include high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes.<sup>5</sup>

#### **5. Cancer**

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As a male, your risk of developing cancer in your lifetime is nearly 40%.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of your cancer's type, there's a good chance the treatment can affect your vision. Chemotherapy is known to worsen existing cataracts and chronic dry eye. Radiation near the eyes can inflame the skin, cornea and conjunctiva, and cause bleeding from the retina.<sup>6</sup>

Other common eye problems in cancer patients include bleeding (in the front or the back of the eye, due to low blood count) and fluctuations that require a change in prescription lenses. When cancer involves the brain, double vision, visual field loss and optic nerve swelling can occur. Many cancer treatments will decrease your ability to fight infection, which increases your chances of developing eye infections.<sup>6</sup>

#### **What you can do**

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Your risk of developing these common health issues and the potential vision complications that may result can be reduced with healthy lifestyle choices:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Stop smoking
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Visit regularly with your physician and your eye doctor for thorough check-ups

Have questions about your vision? Schedule an eye exam today.

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2. Diabetes, World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/diabetes>. April 13, 2021.
3. Men and Heart Disease, CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/men.htm>. February 3, 2021.
4. High blood pressure dangers: Hypertension's effects on your body, Mayo Clinic Staff. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20045868>. November 19, 2020.
5. High cholesterol may be risky for your eyes, Harvard Health. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/high-cholesterol-may-be-risky-for-your-eyes>. August 1, 2020.
6. Lifetime Risk of Developing or Dying From Cancer, American Cancer Society. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-basics/lifetime-probability-of-developing-or-dying-from-cancer.html>. January 13, 2020.

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