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THE EYES PROVIDE A WINDOW TO DIABETES DIAGNOSIS

Protect your vision and schedule a comprehensive eye examination with a licensed eye doctor.

MADISON, Wis. – Diabetes has a significant impact on an individual's overall health, and the economic costs the disease places on the nation are substantial. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) most current National Diabetes Report (<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/data/statistics-report/index.html>), diabetes affects over 37 million Americans (11.3% of the population), with 96 million more Americans having prediabetes which of course places them at a high risk for developing the disease. While 28.7 million of these cases are diagnosed, 8.5 million, or 23% of people with diabetes, remain undiagnosed. The total cost of diabetes in terms of medical care and lost productivity is \$327 billion nationwide.

While many know diabetes is both a prevalent and damaging disease, they may not be aware of the important role eye doctors play in the diagnosis and care of the diabetic patient. The members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) encourage all citizens to visit their eye doctor for a yearly, comprehensive eye exam to ensure the early detection of diabetes and prevention of complications from this ubiquitous disease.

WOA President and Viroqua, WI optometrist Dr. Andrew Nahas explains, "A comprehensive dilated eye examination is crucial to the early detection and prevention of diabetes-related complications." As Dr. Nahas clarifies, "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 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. Nahas. "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."

According to the American Optometric Association, diabetes is the leading cause of vision loss among American adults under the age of 74. This is due to a complication known as diabetic retinopathy, which is a serious sight-threatening complication of diabetes. 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 diabetic retinopathy may include blurring of vision, night vision problems, spots/floaters seen by one or both eyes, and having a dark or empty spot in the center of your vision.

Frequently, there are no obvious symptoms for the patient to recognize in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. Dr. Nahas 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. Those with diabetic retinopathy are then also more likely to suffer from glaucoma. Glaucoma is an eye disease characterized by progressive damage to the optic nerve. Left untreated, diabetic retinopathy can cause severe vision loss and even blindness.

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. If you experience sudden blurred or double vision, trouble reading or focusing on near-work, eye pain or pressure, a noticeable aura or dark ring around lights or illuminated objects, visible dark spots in your vision, or images of flashing lights, WOA recommends contacting your eye doctor as soon as possible. Individuals with diabetes should take prescribed medication as directed, stick to a healthy diet, exercise regularly, control high blood pressure, and avoid both alcohol and 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 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.