



What you should know

Do you have heart disease? How your vision may be at risk

Heart disease, also known as cardiovascular disease, is caused by narrowed and blocked blood vessels. Oxygen-rich blood is not able to reach your heart, brain and other parts of your body. This blood vessel narrowing can also hurt the blood vessels inside your eyes. Your eye doctor can find signs of heart disease and high blood pressure. For many people, their eye doctor is the first to find their heart-related conditions.

The damage caused by heart disease and high blood pressure inside the eye is called hypertensive retinopathy. Studies have shown the presence of retinopathy can be a reason to start blood pressure treatment. Early blood vessel changes in the eye can be a sign of high blood pressure. This has been found in people even if they have normal blood pressure readings.¹

People with signs of hypertensive retinopathy have higher chances of having a stroke. They also have higher chances of having strokes within the eye that can cause blindness. A comprehensive eye exam is an important tool. It can find and help control hypertension, heart disease and their many complications. Your eye doctor can talk to your primary care doctor for further care if any problems are found.

One of the best ways to prevent retinopathy is by avoiding major heart disease risk factors. Smoking is one of the greatest causes of heart disease. Smoking raises your chances of retinopathy as well as, cataracts (a cloudy eye lens) and macular degeneration (loss of central vision).²

Remember to schedule a yearly eye exam. Your eye doctor may catch early signs of heart disease. Catching it early can mean treatment before it damages your eyes and other parts of your body.

Ways you can control your blood pressure:

- > Eat a better diet, which may include reducing salt
- > Enjoy regular physical activity
- > Maintain a healthy weight
- > Manage stress
- > Follow doctor's orders on prescriptions
- > Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke
- > If you drink, limit alcohol

Source: www.cdc.gov

Make an annual eye exam part of your wellness care. You're not just taking care of your eyes, you're taking care of your heart.



¹ Wong T.Y. and Mitchell P. Hypertensive Retinopathy, N Engl J Med 2004; 351:2310-2317

² ACK Cheng, et al. Smoking and ocular diseases HKMJ 2000; 6:195-202

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