

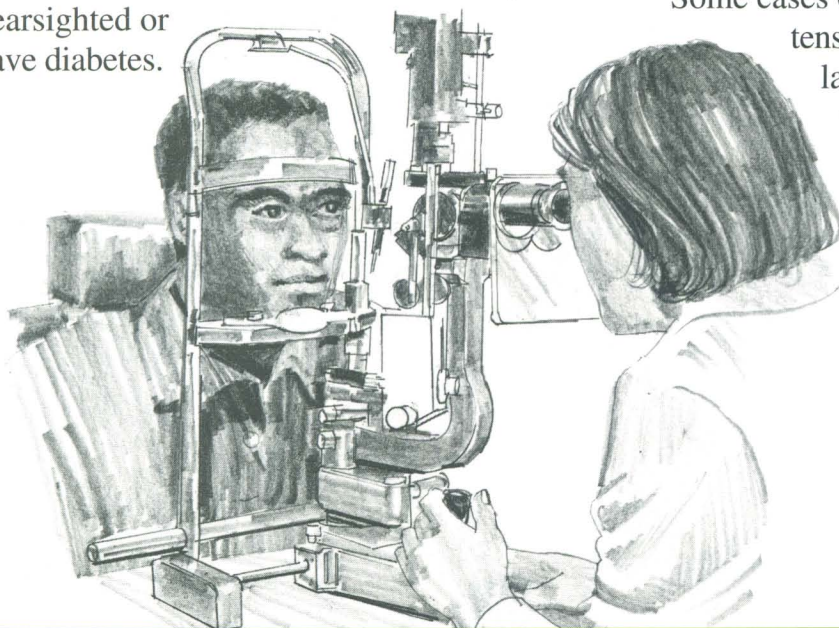
# HAT BLACK AMERICANS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT EYE HEALTH

Some eye conditions and diseases are more prevalent among African-Americans than non-blacks. You can help safeguard your family's eye health by becoming aware of these diseases and obtaining eye examinations from your optometrist on a regular basis.

## **Glaucoma**

Glaucoma is an eye disease that occurs when fluid produced in the eye cannot drain properly. When the passages that normally drain fluid from the eyes become blocked or clogged, pressure builds on the optic nerve and reduces the nerve's ability to transmit messages to the brain. Left untreated, glaucoma can result in partial or complete vision loss. Unfortunately, vision lost to glaucoma cannot be restored.

People of all races and ages can develop glaucoma. However, research shows that the disease is more prevalent in blacks, those over 40 years of age, those with histories of glaucoma in their families, and those who are very nearsighted or have diabetes.



Treatment consists of eye drops or other medications, and, in some cases, surgery. If you have glaucoma, your doctor of optometry will recommend a treatment plan to effectively manage the disease.

## **Hypertensive and Diabetic Retinopathy**

High blood pressure, called hypertension, and diabetes are also more common among African-Americans. These diseases can weaken the vessels that carry blood to your eyes' retinas, the nerve-rich linings of the back of the eyes. Without adequate blood flow, the retinas can become damaged resulting in partial vision loss or blindness. This condition is called retinopathy.

If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, it is essential to follow the instructions of *both* your optometrist and your physician. A special diet and regular exercise can benefit your overall health and your management of these diseases. You may also need prescription medication, and more frequent visits to your optometrist and physician may be required.

Some cases of advanced diabetic and hypertensive retinopathy can be treated with laser or surgical procedures. If and when this treatment is needed, your doctor of optometry will explain the procedure and make any necessary arrangements for this specialized care.

**A comprehensive eye examination, obtained according to a schedule recommended by your optometrist, is an essential step in the early diagnosis and treatment of eye disease.**

**HEALTHY EYES MEAN A BETTER LIFE**

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### What You Can Do

- Since there are few, if any, early warning signs associated with glaucoma, hypertensive retinopathy, and diabetic retinopathy, it is extremely important to obtain eye examinations according to a schedule recommended by your doctor of optometry. ***Early detection is essential to the successful management of these diseases.***

- If you already know that you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol (which can also affect the flow of blood to the eyes), be sure to inform your optometrist. Your optometrist will also want to know if any of your parents, sisters or brothers, or your grandparents have had any of these conditions, glaucoma, or other diseases that can affect eye health.

**Always consult your doctor of optometry before changing or discontinuing any treatment plan.**

- Tell your optometrist the names of any prescription and non-prescription medications you are currently taking or bring the labeled bottles with you when you visit your optometrist's office. Some medications have side effects that can temporarily affect your vision.

- Follow your optometrist's and your physician's complete instructions about diet, exercise, medication, and follow-up visits. ***Do not discontinue or change your treatment plan without consulting your doctors.***

- Discuss any questions or concerns you have with your optometrist or physician. Don't rely on second-hand information from friends or family members.

- Remember to safeguard the eye health of family members by scheduling examinations according to a schedule recommended by your doctor of optometry.

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