

# How You Can Lose Your Eyesight to Diabetic Retinopathy if Untreated

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Meet Gede. He is 28, lives in Bandung, Java, Indonesia, and has Type 2 diabetes. Gede lost his sight from Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) or diabetic blindness, which could have been avoided. Like other young men and women with diabetes, he did not think he was at risk and didn't routinely undertake diabetic eye screenings. His sight gradually deteriorated, and when he finally reviewed his diabetic eye reports, it was too advanced to treat.

Admittedly grim. But this is a true story and this bleak outcome can perhaps be attributed to lack of awareness and to some extent, neglect.

If this was not enough, here are some hard facts about the increase of diabetes and population health risks. Obesity, one of the likely causes of diabetes, has risen quickly in the OECD in recent decades and projections indicate that this trend will continue. It is estimated that more than 400 million people in the world have diabetes and this number is expected to exceed 600 million by 2030. In 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO), reported that in Iceland alone, there is a 7.1% prevalence of diabetes and related risks. OECD health statistics for 2017 cite diabetes as one of the top 6 causes for adult mortality. Zoega reported a 0.3% blindness prevalence in diabetic patients in Iceland.

These are alarming numbers and Gede's story is not the only one. DR, broken down, is a transformation of the retina and if left undiagnosed and untreated, can result in unchangeable visual loss or even blindness. It usually develops several years after the onset of diabetes, and often no symptoms during the early stages of the disease, nor any pain. This often lulls people with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes to not undergo regular screenings. It's important, therefore, not to wait for symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they range from mildly blurred central vision to complete vision loss. Symptoms may progress slowly—or rapidly.

Diabetes is the most common cause of blindness amongst working age people in most countries around the world. DR is still one of the most frequent causes of blindness and public

health institutions recommend early screenings at frequent intervals for detection and prevention to preserve eyesight. The responsibility of undergoing regular screenings rests with both, the healthcare practitioner and with diabetic individuals. Undertaking regular screenings along with other measures like sugar control minimizes risk, and helps patients receive timely treatment.