

EYE SCREENING CAN PREVENT EYE DISEASE

PERSONALIZED FOLLOW-UP INCREASES RETURN RATE AT URBAN EYE DISEASE SCREENING CLINICS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH DIABETES: RESULTS OF A RANDOMIZED TRIAL

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Diabetes is a bad news, good news story. The bad news is that diabetes has many serious complications that include: kidney failure, amputations of the feet, heart disease, nerve disease, and vision loss and even blindness. The good news is that most of the complications of diabetes can be delayed for many years or prevented altogether. Also, there are effective treatments for many of the complications if they are detected early enough. For example, diabetes eye disease can be successfully treated if it is detected in the early stages. If you have diabetes, you should have your eyes examined every year to make sure the diabetes has not begun to damage the blood vessels in your eyes.

In this study in *Ethnicity & Disease*, researchers wanted to find out if they could increase the number of African Americans with diabetes who received annual eye examinations. The study involved patients who had come to one of the free community-based eye screening clinics and had been advised to return in one year for their annual eye exam. Eleven months later, patients received a letter reminding them to call a toll-free number to make an appointment to have their eyes examined. Ten days after sending out the letter, the researchers developed a list of patients who had not yet called for an appointment. They chose half the patients on the list by chance and called to remind them to schedule an eye exam. The phone calls increased the number of patients who returned for an annual diabetes eye exam. Just 35% of the patients who had received

only the letter returned for a follow-up exam while 66% of the patients who received a letter *and* a phone call returned for their exam. As soon as the researchers were certain that the group receiving the letter and phone calls was truly returning at much higher rates, the study was stopped and reminder phone calls were made to all patients who had not called after being sent their letter.

Almost all of the people in the study were very busy. They were trying to balance work, family, and managing their diabetes, all of which can prove quite challenging. It is understandable how patients could set aside and forget a letter reminding them to get their annual eye exam. However, it is potentially tragic because vision loss due to diabetes can be prevented. If you or someone you care about has diabetes it is important that you learn as much as you can about managing the illness and especially those things that you can do to prevent the complications of diabetes. It is also very important to be aware of the tests that a person with diabetes should have in order to detect the complications at their earliest and most treatable stage. To find out more about these important topics you can contact the following organizations:

The American Diabetes Association
1-800-232-3472 *or* www.diabetes.org

The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP)
1-800-438-5383 *or* www.ndep.nih.gov