

Weighing In On Eye Health

Diane Prather-Huff, OD, MPH

Expanding waistlines are linked to poor health. Being overweight is also linked to eye problems, which could lead to vision loss. Because being very overweight leads to poor health, there is a greater need to understand what happens to the eyes.

Two Israeli doctors reviewed many studies of patients worldwide. They found a strong link between obesity and four eye diseases that cause blindness: age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

The researchers said that although the evidence was out there suggesting a link between obesity and these conditions, the results were not well known.

The eye doctors said that people with high Body Mass Index (BMI) who are very overweight have a higher chance of eye disease. These diseases are

also more likely to progress faster in obese people. The researchers said that in some cases the reason for the link between obesity and the diseases was clear. For example, since glaucoma, diabetes and AMD all affect the body's blood vessel system and excess weight is known to create problems, the blood vessels in the eyes are affected and sight decreases.

These findings show the importance of maintaining your weight and its relationship to your height. An easy way to find your Body Mass Index (BMI) is a simple calculation of height and weight. Normal ranges are between 18 and 25. Your BMI will give you a baseline.

Research also shows that living a healthy lifestyle with a diet of eye protective foods, plenty of water, exercise and stress reduction help the body as well as the eyes.

- **Glaucoma** is a group of diseases that can damage the eye's optic nerve and result in vision loss and blindness.
- **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)** is a disease that blurs the sharp, central vision you need for "straight-ahead" activities such as reading, sewing, and driving. AMD affects the macula, the part of the eye that allows you to see fine detail.
- **A cataract** is a clouding of the lens in the eye that affects vision.
- **Diabetic retinopathy** is a complication of diabetes and a leading cause of blindness. It occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

"The message we want to send is that obesity can cause not just cancer and high blood pressure, but also eye disease. It's the risk factor that no one talks about."



Federal Employee Program

FEP BlueVision®

1. N Cheung and T Wong, "Obesity and Eye Diseases," Survey of Ophthalmology 52, no. 2 (3, 2007): 180-195.
2. Zohar Habet-Willner and Michael Belkin, "[Obesity is a risk factor for eye diseases]," Harefuah 144, no. 11 (November 2005): 805-809, 821.
3. "Israeli researchers connect obesity to eye disease | Worldhealth.net," http://www.worldhealth.net/news/israeli_researchers_connect_obesity_to_e/.
4. "Calculate your BMI - Standard BMI Calculator," <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>.
5. "Diet & Nutrition," <http://www.aoa.org/nutrition.xml>.

