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NEWS RELEASE
November is Diabetic Eye Disease Month

Are you one of the 24 million Americans who have diabetes? If your answer is yes, be sure to schedule a complete dilated eye exam every year.

“November is Diabetic Eye Disease Month, when eye doctors remind those with diabetes to get a dilated eye exam every year. Also, pregnant women with diabetes should have an eye exam in the first trimester, since diabetic eye disease can progress quickly during pregnancy,” said Sue Smith, Deputy Director of the Otsego County Department of Health.

“Diabetic eye problems are among the most common complications facing people with diabetes. Yearly dilated eye exams are crucial because early detection and treatment of diabetic retinopathy can usually prevent permanent vision loss,” she said.

Diabetic retinopathy, a degenerative disease of the retina, affects millions of people age 18 and older. The risk of developing it increases with the number of years a person has had diabetes.

However, diabetic retinopathy can also appear within the first year or two after the onset of diabetes. So it’s important to take care of your eyes as well as your overall health.

“Keeping your blood sugar under control decreases your risk for many complications associated with diabetes, including eye disease. High blood sugar can damage the blood vessels in the retina. Blood sugar fluctuation can also lead to blurred vision and/or permanent vision impairment,” Sue Smith said.

In most cases, eye problems in people with diabetes can be prevented. Prevention starts with overall good health and management of your diabetes, cholesterol and high blood pressure. Studies show that keeping all these conditions as normal as possible greatly lowers the risk of developing retinopathy or having it get worse.

“If you have diabetes, talk to your health care provider about the need to get your eyes checked every year, including a dilated eye exam. Stay on top of your overall health by also getting an annual check up,” Sue Smith said.

For more information about diabetes and diabetic eye disease, call the Otsego County Department of Health at (607)547-4230.

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