

Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme



Information for patients



As you have diabetes, your GP has arranged for you to attend the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme. This service is free and is provided as part of your diabetes care.

What is diabetic retinopathy?

This occurs when diabetes damages the small blood vessels in the part of the eye called the retina. These blood vessels can become blocked or leaky, affecting how the retina works. Sometimes abnormal 'new vessels' grow which are weak and can bleed easily. In the early stages, these changes will not normally affect your sight. However, if left untreated, the retinopathy may get worse and your vision may be affected.

Why is it important to screen for diabetic retinopathy?

Screening for diabetic retinopathy can detect changes in the retina at an early stage, before you are aware of them. If detected in time, treatment is very effective at preventing loss of vision in the majority of people. It is therefore important to have your eyes screened and to attend all screening appointments.

Do all people with diabetes need to be screened?

Yes. People with diabetes aged 12 years and over should have their eyes screened. Regardless of how your diabetes is controlled, whether you attend your GP or a hospital consultant, you still need to attend for screening.

I am already going to an eye clinic. Do I still need to be screened?

Only people who are already attending a hospital eye clinic for treatment of diabetic retinopathy do not need to be screened. If you are attending an eye clinic for another condition, then you do need to attend for screening. If in doubt, please speak to your GP or practice nurse.

I am already going to my optometrist (optician). Do I still need to attend my screening appointment?

Yes. It is important that screening is carried out within an organised programme which is monitored to make sure it is of a high standard.

Will I still need to go to my optometrist (optician)?

Yes. You should still visit your optometrist every year to have a sight test for glasses. This test is free to people with diabetes.





Where did you obtain my contact details?

Your details are sent to the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme from your GP. GP practices are contacted for the list of their eligible patients, so it is important that he or she always has your correct name and address. As long as you are registered with your GP and are eligible, you will be invited for screening. Your information will be held by the screening programme and will be updated each year via the GP system (for example, if your address changes). Your details will not be passed to any organisations outside the health service without your prior permission.

What details will be sent from my GP surgery to the retinopathy screening programme?

Your name, date of birth and address details will be sent, together with the important details about your diabetes and the medication (if any) that you are taking to help control this. This is necessary to help the eye specialist when the photographs of your eye are examined.

What actually happens at retinopathy screening?

The screening test involves two photographs being taken of the back of each eye, using a special camera. The test is painless and takes about 15 minutes. If you are over 50 years of age you will need to have drops put in your eyes about 15 minutes before the test to dilate your pupils.

This helps to get a good quality photograph. Eye drops may also be used in a small number of younger people. If this is needed, the photographer will discuss it with you when you attend.

Do the eye drops have any effects?

The drops may cause some stinging for a few seconds only. After about 15 minutes your sight will become blurred and it may be difficult to focus on objects near you. This blurring can last for several hours, making it unsafe for you to drive.

YOU ARE STRONGLY ADVISED NOT TO DRIVE A MOTOR VEHICLE FOR AT LEAST TWO HOURS AFTER RECEIVING EYE DROPS, AND UNTIL YOU FEEL COMPETENT TO DO SO.

Very rarely, the drops can cause a sudden rise in the pressure within the eye. This is recognised by:

- pain or severe discomfort in or around the eye;
- redness of the white of the eye;
- worsening or persistent blurred vision a few hours after being screened.

If you have any of these symptoms, you should return to your GP or go to an Accident and Emergency department. Treatment is very successful and will prevent further episodes in the future.





How will I get my result?

You will not get your result at the end of the screening test, as the photographs will need to be looked at by a specially trained person. A report will be sent to your GP within four weeks and you can contact your GP who will inform you of the result.

Who else will receive my screening result?

If you attend a hospital diabetes clinic, the result will also be sent to the consultant providing your care. Nobody else will receive your result unless you give permission.

What happens next?

Most people will just be invited for screening again in a year's time. However, you will be contacted for further assessment if:

- the photographs are not clear enough to give an accurate result;
- you have diabetic eye changes which need follow-up or treatment at a hospital eye clinic;
- other eye conditions are detected by chance that need more investigation.

What should I do if I have any concerns about my eyes between screening appointments?

Do not wait for your next screening appointment. Get advice from your GP or optometrist (optician).

How is my screening information used?

The screening programme will keep your photographs and details for at least eight years. This is so that the screening programme can compare your most recent photographs with previous ones. Screening records are also reviewed regularly to monitor and improve the quality of the programme, and to maintain the expertise of the specialist staff. This is an important part of any screening programme. Only staff working for the Northern Ireland Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme may see and review your records.

What happens if diabetic retinopathy is found in my eyes?

Depending on the level of diabetic retinopathy changes, you may be referred to an eye clinic for further assessment. Otherwise, you will be invited for screening again in a year's time.

Is there treatment for diabetic retinopathy?

Yes. Laser treatment is very effective at preventing loss of vision in most people, if carried out at the right time. The specialist at the eye clinic will explain this to you.

**WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE
DIABETIC RETINOPATHY, IT IS ALWAYS
IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN GOOD
CONTROL OF YOUR BLOOD GLUCOSE
LEVELS AND BLOOD PRESSURE.**





GOOD NEWS ABOUT DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

- It is a treatable condition.
- Screening is important because early signs of retinopathy usually do not cause any symptoms.
- Everyone with diabetes should have both eyes examined regularly for this condition.
- The test to detect damage to the eye is free.
- The test is painless.
- The test takes only about 15 minutes.
- If the condition is found in the early stages, loss of vision can be prevented.

For further information on diabetic retinopathy, speak to your GP or optometrist (optician) or contact:

Diabetes UK
Telephone: 028 9066 6646
Website: www.diabetes.org.uk