

Diabetic eye screening

Why do I have to have my eyes screened?

Our Diabetic Eye Screening Programme aims to reduce the risk of sight loss in people with diabetes. The screening process can identify diabetic eye disease early so we can ensure you receive treatment quickly, which will hopefully save your sight.

Who is diabetic eye screening offered to?

We offer screening to everyone with diabetes aged 12 years and over, who is eligible.

What is diabetic retinopathy (diabetic eye disease)?

If your blood sugar level is higher than it should be, it can damage the small blood vessels on the retina (the part of the eye that is responsible for seeing). These changes are called diabetic retinopathy. When these changes are severe they can damage your sight.

Does everyone with diabetes develop diabetic retinopathy?

No, but it is more common the longer you have had diabetes or if you have poorly controlled diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetic kidney problems and if you smoke. All people with diabetes are at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, whether their diabetes is controlled by diet, tablets or insulin.

I don't seem to have a problem with my sight, does that mean I don't have diabetic retinopathy?

No, just because you haven't noticed any difference in your sight it doesn't mean there haven't been any diabetic changes to the back of your eyes. This is why diabetic eye screening is so important. Through screening we can catch any early changes before they become a problem so that you don't suffer any deterioration in your sight as a result of diabetes.

What does screening involve?

A retinal screener will ask you a few questions about your eyes and general health and then will perform an eye test (so remember to bring your distance glasses). They will then use eye drops to dilate (enlarge) your pupils; these normally take around 15 - 20 minutes to take effect. Once your pupils are fully dilated the screener will then take a few photographs of the back of each eye. You will be asked to place your chin on the chin rest, forehead against the bar and follow a light. There will be a bright flash as the photograph is taken. Nothing touches your eyes at all and there are no puffs of air.

Why do you administer eye drops?

We use Tropicamide 1% eye drops to dilate your pupils. The eye drops will enlarge your pupils so we can take a good quality photograph of the retina. The eye drops sting (like getting shampoo in your eyes) for a few seconds initially, but this quickly wears off. The drops don't turn your eyes yellow. The drops take a minimum of 15 minutes to take effect (some people's eyes take longer to dilate and require further drops).

Can I drive home afterwards?

No. As we have dilated your eyes you may experience blurred vision for up to six hours. It's a good idea to arrange a lift home as you cannot drive until your vision returns to normal. Driving with impaired vision will invalidate your insurance policy.

Will I have any side effects with dilating drops?

It is possible for the pressure inside your eye to go up. Although rare, if you experience a severe headache or eye pain with blurred vision later on in the day then you should go straight to your local eye casualty department for an assessment.

Do I need to bring my glasses to the appointment?

Yes, if you use them for your distance vision (driving or watching television) we will ask you to wear your distance glasses when doing the sight test. We do not assess if you need glasses or not - this will need to be done at your local opticians.

Can I wear my contact lenses to the appointment?

Yes you can, but you will be asked to remove them before having the eye drops and you should wait at least 30 minutes before you put them back in. Therefore, you may find it easier to wear glasses to the appointment instead.

Do I need to go to the opticians as well as have my eyes screened?

Yes, it's very important to have both diabetic eye screening and regular optician's appointments. Diabetic eye screening is specifically for diabetic changes, while your optician will check the general health of your eyes and prescribe glasses if you need them, it is important to attend every 1-2 years.

Can the opticians check for diabetic retinopathy instead?

Whilst opticians may be able to see some diabetic changes, the screening programme is an accredited and quality assured service. Opticians working outside the screening programme may not hold these accreditations. All screening programme staff undergo training in diabetic eye disease and specialist eye doctors who work in the programme can make direct referrals to the eye unit if necessary.

Who assesses the photographs of my retina?

Your photographs are assessed by fully trained graders that have been approved by the National Diabetic Eye Screening Programme. They have undergone specific training and complete tests once a month to ensure they are consistently meeting high standards. We work closely with specialist eye doctors who may assess the images if they are at a referable level and are on hand to offer advice if needed.

Will I receive my results at the time of screening?

No. It takes time to assess your photographs thoroughly at our grading centre so we will contact you with your results approximately 3 weeks after your appointment.

My results say background retinopathy, what does this mean?

Background retinopathy is a term for mild changes where we can see early damage to the blood vessels in the retina. Background retinopathy will not affect your vision and does not need treatment.

Last year my results identified background retinopathy, this year they are normal, how can this be?

It is possible for some early changes seen in diabetic retinopathy to disappear over time, especially with good blood sugar control.

I have been referred to the eye unit, what will happen now?

You will be seen by a specialist eye doctor who will examine your eyes with a microscope. You may require further tests to look at the back of the eye. The eye doctor will decide whether you need to stay under review at the eye unit if you require any treatment, or if you can be discharged back to diabetic eye screening. If you do not attend your hospital appointment on two consecutive occasions you will be discharged back to your GP/screening and will miss the opportunity to be seen by an eye doctor and to be offered treatment that could preserve your vision if needed.

Can diabetic retinopathy be treated?

If sight threatening changes are treated promptly, **treatment can prevent sight loss**. Treatment can involve laser and other methods. Your specialist eye doctor will discuss which treatment you require.

Background retinopathy does not usually require treatment other than ensuring your blood sugar levels are under better control.

How often should I have my diabetic eye screening?

You should have your eyes screened once a year. The diabetic eye screening service will automatically send you a letter inviting you to your appointment. If it is not convenient, please call the bookings team to make any changes.

What if I am pregnant?

If you are pregnant, we will bring you to screening once every trimester, as you have a higher likelihood of developing retinopathy whilst pregnant. We will use a more diluted version of our eye drops to minimise the possibility of any risk to your baby. Your results will be sent to you in the same timescale as usual.

How can I reduce the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy?

You can reduce the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy and slow down the process of sight threatening diabetic retinopathy by:

- keeping your blood glucose and blood pressure well controlled
- keeping your cholesterol well controlled
- not smoking or drinking excess alcohol
- attending your annual diabetic eye screening appointment

When should I seek urgent professional advice?

Even if you are being seen by the diabetic eye screening service, you should seek urgent professional advice or contact your local eye casualty if:

- your sight suddenly worsens / becomes distorted
- you lose all or part of your vision
- you have a sudden increase in floaters in your vision

Attending Diabetic Eye Screening reduces your risk of sight loss



For more information, talk to your GP or diabetes nurse, visit www.nwldesp.co.uk, or scan this QR code with your smartphone

