Your guide to diabetic retinopathy screening

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What is diabetic retinopathy?

Retinopathy is when an area at the back of the eye called the retina becomes damaged.

When a person has diabetes they cannot process sugar properly. Sugar levels can build up and damage blood vessels. The blood vessels in the eye can be damaged too and that is what we check for in the eye photographs.

Diabetic retinopathy may cause blindness or serious damage to your eyesight. At first there are no signs so you may not know that you have diabetic retinopathy.

Why should I be screened?

You have been invited to screening because you have diabetes, and your eyes are at risk of damage from diabetic retinopathy.

Screening is an important part of your diabetes care and can find the condition early, before you notice any changes to your sight. When the condition is caught early, treatment can reduce or prevent damage to your sight.

How often will I be offered screening?

Screening is offered every year to anyone with diabetes aged 12 and over.
What will happen at my screening appointment?

1. Photographs are taken of the back of your eyes. The camera does not touch your eyes. All photographs are then carefully looked at for signs of retinopathy.

2. Some people may need to be given eye drops so that a good photograph can be taken.

3. The appointment will normally last about 10 minutes (it may take 30 minutes if eye drops are used).

4. A letter with your results is sent to you and your GP (and your hospital diabetes clinic, if you go to one) within 4 weeks.

Bring all the glasses and contact lenses you wear to the appointment with you.
Are there any side effects?

If eye drops are used, there may be some side effects:

- Your eyes may sting for a short time.
- Bright light might hurt your eyes for a while, so you may want to bring sunglasses to wear afterwards.
- You may have blurred vision and should not drive for a few hours after the appointment. You should make other arrangements for getting home safely.

The law says you should not drive if you cannot read a number plate clearly from 25 yards/20.5 metres.

Will I still need to have a regular eye test at the opticians?

Yes, you need to do both. You will still need regular eye examinations so you should continue to visit your optician regularly for a free eye check as well.

What screening results might I get?

If the photograph is not clear enough, you will be asked to come back for another screening test. If any slight changes to your eyes are found, you may be asked to return for a further appointment in 6 months’ time. Your results may show that you need more tests, or treatment. The hospital eye clinic will contact you with an appointment.

Diabetic retinopathy can usually be treated, especially if found early.

Only authorised staff and appropriate healthcare professionals can see your screening results. If you need more information about NHS record-keeping, you can phone the NHS inform helpline on 0800 22 44 88 (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline also provides information in other languages.
How can I reduce the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy?

- Control your blood sugar as effectively as possible.
- See your doctor regularly to check your blood pressure.
- Go to your diabetic retinopathy screening appointments.
- Visit your optician if you have a problem with your sight.
- Take your medicines as prescribed.

Where can I get more information?

Your invitation letter has more details about what you need to do next. You can also find out more by visiting:

NHS inform:
www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening

My Diabetes My Way:
www.mydiabetesmyway.scot.nhs.uk

Diabetes UK Scotland:
www.diabetes.org.uk/scotland

Or phone the Diabetes UK Careline
0845 120 2960

For information about your health rights and confidentiality:
www.hris.org.uk