

# Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme



Information for patients



Department of

**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)



As you have diabetes, your GP has arranged for you to attend the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Service. 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 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.

## **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 4 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).

## **What happens to my photographs and details after screening?**

The screening service will keep your photographs and details for at least eight years. This can be useful in order to compare your most recent photographs with previous ones. They will also be used to monitor the quality of the screening programme.

## **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 only takes about 15 minutes.
- If 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](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)