



Diabetic Retinopathy

Patient Information Sheet

Stockport Primary Care Trust and Stockport Optometrists

Diabetes and your eyes

Diabetic eye disease (retinopathy) can affect anyone who has diabetes, whether they are being treated with insulin, tablets or diet only. Generally, people don't notice any signs of retinopathy until it is well advanced. This is why yearly eye examinations are so important for everyone with diabetes. Early detection is the key to successful treatment.

Retinopathy affects the blood vessels supplying the retina – the inner surface of the eye, which receives the images of things you see and passes them to the brain. Blood vessels can become blocked, leak or grow haphazardly. This affects the way the retina receives images and, if left untreated, can damage your sight.

Why is my vision blurred?

Blurred vision is not usually a sign of retinopathy, but is common at the time you are diagnosed with diabetes or just afterwards. Blurred vision is usually caused by the high level of glucose (sugar) in your blood at this time. Your blood glucose levels may take some weeks to settle down, but once they are under control your vision will return to normal. If this does not happen, see your doctor.

How can I protect my eyes?

You can reduce the risk of retinopathy by controlling your blood-glucose and blood-pressure levels as well as possible, and by not smoking.

In addition, everyone with diabetes aged 12 years and over should have regular eye screening to look for any signs of retinopathy.

Remember that diabetic eye screening will carefully check your eyes for signs of retinopathy. It doesn't detect other eye conditions, so you should continue to visit your own optometrist regularly for a sight test as well. It may be possible to have both at the same time.

Remember - people with diabetes are entitled to a free sight test by their optometrist.

What does screening involve?

Photographs are taken of the retina using a special camera. There is a flash of light when a photo is taken but this should not be uncomfortable.

The screener will put drops in your eyes. These may make your vision blurred so you should not drive for a few hours after the screening. Your eyes will be sensitive to bright light for a while, so sunglasses may help.

Very rarely, the drops can cause a sudden rise in pressure in the eye. This would happen only if you were at risk of getting this problem at some time anyway.

Following screening, if either eye becomes very painful or red or you get an unusually severe headache, possibly with cloudy vision, then you must seek help straight away. Contact the screener or go to your local hospital Accident and Emergency department.

What is the treatment for retinopathy?

A laser is used to stabilise the retina and the leaking blood vessels.

Don't wait...

Screening for diabetic eye disease is important – it is an effective way of finding problems at the earliest stage.

Don't wait till you notice a change in your vision! Diabetic eye disease usually has no symptoms until it is well advanced. By then, treatment may not work. So it is very important to have your eyes screened every year.

A free interpreting service is available if you need help with this information. Please telephone Stockport English Language Service on 0161-477 9000
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