

Diabetes and your eyes

Diabetic retinopathy can affect anyone who has diabetes, whether they are being treated with insulin, tablets or diet only. Generally, retinopathy has no obvious symptoms until it is well advanced. This is why annual eye examinations are so important for everyone with diabetes. Early detection is the key to successful treatment.

What is retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy affects the blood vessels supplying the retina - the 'seeing' part of the eye. Blood vessels can become blocked, leak or grow haphazardly. This affects the way the retina receives the things you see and, if left untreated, can damage vision.

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?

Your best defence against retinopathy is to have an eye examination when your diabetes is diagnosed and once a year after that, as part of your annual diabetes review.

Don't wait until you notice a change in your vision. Retinopathy often has no symptoms until it is well advanced, and by this time treatment is more difficult.

What does an eye examination involve?

A proper eye examination involves more than reading letters off a wall chart. People with diabetes need to have both retinas examined. This can be done by a diabetologist, an optometrist, an ophthalmologist, or a family doctor with a special interest and knowledge of diabetes.

In this eye examination, the person checking your eyes uses an ophthalmoscope to view the retina. They will first dilate (widen) your pupils using special eye drops. This allows them a clear view of the retina. They may also use a larger instrument with a bright light, together with a small hand-held lens. The drops used to dilate your pupils can sting a little. If you find your vision is affected, you should

avoid driving for a few hours afterwards. Your eyes will also be sensitive to bright light for a while, so wearing sunglasses may help.

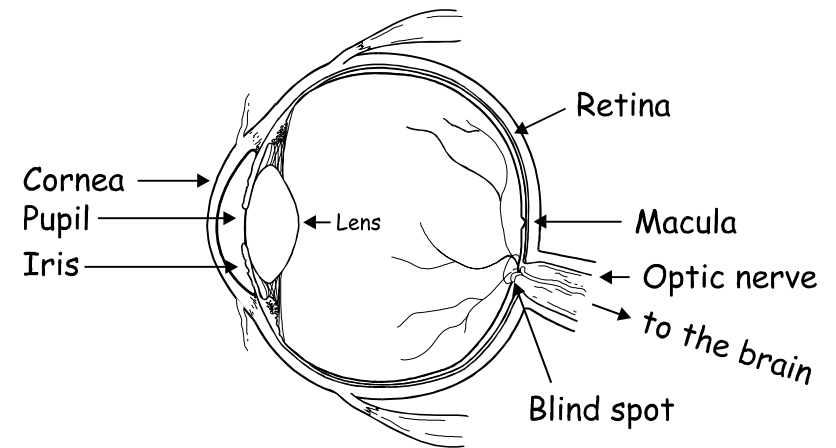
Remember - people with diabetes can have free eye examinations by their optometrist.

What is the treatment for retinopathy?

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

Diabetic Retinopathy

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