

Diabetic Eye Disease (Diabetic Retinopathy)

About one third of people with diabetes go on to have eye disease. If your diabetes is well controlled you are less likely to have sight problems, or they may be less serious.

Prevention and Screening

If you have diabetes, it is important to detect any signs of disease early or prevent your eye disease becoming worse. You can do this by:

- attending the NHS diabetic eye screening clinic for photography of the eyes, this is organised in North Central London by NCL DESP NMUH
- a lot of information about diabetic eye disease is also available on the following website: 'www.diabeticeye.screening.nhs.uk'
- controlling your diabetes as well as possible
- not smoking
- reducing high blood pressure (your doctor may treat this with medicines)

Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetes can affect your sight in a number of ways. Diabetic Retinopathy is a disease, which affects the tiny blood vessels in the retina at the back of the eye.

There are three types:

1. Background diabetic retinopathy

This is the most common eye disease in people who have had diabetes for a long time. It affects the retina; but does not generally affect your sight. Bleeding and leaking blood vessels are present. It can lead to the two following, more serious forms of the disease.

2. Maculopathy

The blood vessels in the retina start to leak fluid and damage the centre of your eye, the macula. This can affect your fine, detailed vision so that you find it difficult to recognise people's faces at a distance or see small print. In severe cases you can lose your ability to read and you will not be able to drive.

3. Proliferative diabetic retinopathy

This causes sight loss if untreated. The blood vessels in the retina become blocked which leads to a reduced blood supply and a lack of oxygen to the retina. As a result, new vessels form but they are weaker and in the wrong place - in front of the retina - so they bleed easily and cause scar tissue to form in the eye. The retina can also get pulled out of position, which makes your sight suddenly worse. All these conditions can be prevented by early diagnosis; so regular eye checks are essential.

Other Common eye diseases in diabetic Patients:

- Cataracts, which are smoky growths on the lens in your eye
- Dry eyes

What treatments are there?

Cataracts can be removed by surgery. The symptoms of dry eyes can be relieved with drops. Most retinopathy can be improved if you improve your diabetic control. Maculopathy can be treated by laser and/or by injections into the eye (Lucentis). Laser treatment can save the sight you have, not make it better. Injections can improve your sight but they need to be applied regularly, first monthly and then later if the swelling recurs. Some patients with diabetic retinopathy or retinal detachment need to have an operation to repair the retina. In all cases, early treatment is an advantage. Your doctor will discuss with you what treatment you need.

Any questions?

If you have any questions, please contact your consultant.

Useful addresses

Diabetes UK
10 Queen Anne Street
London W1M 0BD
Tel. 020-7424 1000

Partially Sighted Society
224 Great Portland Streets
London W1N 6AA
Tel. 01302 323132

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
PO Box 173
Peterborough PE2 6WS
Tel. 0845 7023153