

Information

Your eyes and diabetes

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Diabetes can cause problems to almost every part of the eye.

To help prevent the development of eye problems which are related to diabetes, or to try to avoid them getting worse, it is important to keep **good control of your blood glucose level**. If possible you should keep the long-term blood glucose test, (HbA_{1c}) at 7 per cent. The doctor either in the surgery or at the diabetes clinic will do this test.

Keeping your **blood pressure below 140/80** will also help reduce the risk of eye complications. Your doctor and nurse can give advice on the levels of HbA_{1c} and blood pressure, which are right for you and advise you on how to reach them.

It is also important to have **regular eye checks, at least once a year**.

What can happen to the eye?

Blurred (unclear) sight can happen when you first start treating your diabetes. It happens because, before you had treatment, your body became dehydrated, (dry), as your body tried to cope with the high blood glucose levels. When your blood glucose levels start to return to normal, the fluid in your eye increases. This causes blurring of sight for a time.

Cataracts can happen when you have had diabetes for some time, and the blood glucose levels have been high. The glucose builds up in the lens of the eye making it cloudy, so light cannot pass through to the back of the eye, (retina). There is an operation, which may be offered to remove the damaged lens and replace it with a plastic one.

Retinopathy is when there is damage to the lining of your eye. The earliest stage is known as background retinopathy and this is when the capillaries (small blood vessels) get bigger and leak extra fluid into the lining of the eye, (retina). As these blood vessels become blocked and leak more, new blood vessels grow to replace those that are not working properly. This is called proliferative (spreading) retinopathy. As the new vessels grow and spread, you will find it more difficult to see. This is more common in people with Type 1 diabetes.

The charity for people with diabetes

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Maculopathy is when fluid from leaking vessels builds up in the macula, which is in the lining of the eye. This affects what you can see when looking straight ahead. This is more common in people with Type 2 diabetes.

Will I go blind?

Damage to the lining of the eye is the main cause of blindness in people of working age, in the UK. This is why it is very important you have your eyes checked every year. At this check up, you will have special drops in your eye, which will make the pupil (the black centre of your eye) bigger. The doctor can then inspect the lining of the eye very carefully. Some doctors use special cameras to take a picture of the back of the eye. These eye checks are very important as you may not know you have some damage to the eye until it stops you being able to see so well but, the doctor will be able to know through these checks if there are any signs of problems in the eye. The sooner any problems are discovered treatment can be started and this will mean you have a better chance of the treatment being successful.

The eye drops used to make your pupil larger may sting a little. Your eyes are likely to stay larger for some time, which will make it difficult to see clearly. You should not drive your car for a few hours after the eye test and you may find it more comfortable to wear sunglasses after the test until the pupil returns to its normal size.

What is the treatment?

In most cases retinopathy can be treated with lasers. If you have damage to the macula, it is not so safe to use lasers as it can stop you seeing clearly when looking straight ahead.

- Laser treatment may be started at the same time as you have your eyes checked.
- Lasers work by sealing the leaking vessels and wiping out any new abnormal vessels.
- Lasers will not make your sight come back if it is already lost because of the retinopathy, but it will help you keep the sight you have.

Does laser treatment hurt?

Most people find, with the use of special pain killing drops, it does not hurt unless several lots of treatment are needed.

What are the side effects?

Laser treatment may affect your sight. How it affects it depends on which area needs treatment. Some people find it stops them being able to see out to the sides. This can make driving unsafe. Others notice they cannot see so well at night.

If you drive a car and have laser treatment, you must tell the DVLA. Even if you do not have laser treatment, you should talk with your doctor about driving if you have damage to your eyes.

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