

Diabetes and your eyes



Redbridge & Waltham Forest
Local Optometric Committee

Patient information leaflet

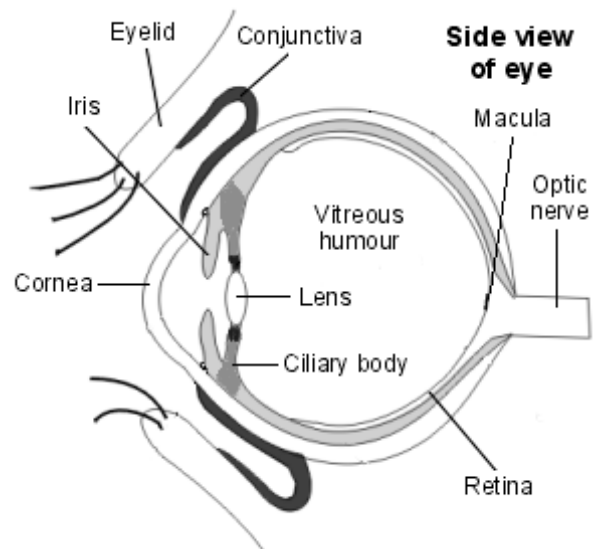
Diabetic retinopathy can affect anyone who has diabetes, whether they are being treated with insulin, tablets or diet only. Generally, retinopathy has no obvious symptoms until it is well advanced. This is why annual eye examinations are so important for everyone with diabetes. Early detection is the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

What is the retina?

The retina is made up from special cells called rods and cones, which line the back of your eyes. Light enters your eye and passes through the lens, which focuses the light on to the retina. Messages about what you see are then passed from the cells in the retina to the optic nerve, and on to the brain. There are many tiny blood vessels next to the retina, which take oxygen and nutrients to the cells of the retina.



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 will the eye examination involve?

People with diabetes need to have both retinas examined. 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 larger instrument with a bright light, together with a small hand-held lens. A photograph of the back of your eye will be taken using a digital fundus camera. The image will then be graded.

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.

What is the treatment for retinopathy?

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