

# Diabetic eye screening in pregnancy

What you need to know



Northern Ireland

**Diabetic Eye  
Screening**

Programme

Everyone with diabetes aged 12 years or over is offered an eye screening appointment. When you're pregnant, changes occur in the body that can affect your diabetes. So it's really important that you attend every eye screening appointment during pregnancy to monitor and detect small changes in the eyes (retinopathy). Early detection and treatment can help prevent sight loss.

### **What is diabetic retinopathy?**

Diabetic retinopathy is a condition caused by high blood sugar levels, which can damage blood vessels at the retina (the area at the back of the eye responsible for eyesight). You may not even be aware that it is happening.

### **Who needs diabetic eye screening during pregnancy?**

In general, people who have already been diagnosed with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes before getting pregnant will need to attend additional eye screening appointments. Patients diagnosed with gestational diabetes are generally not offered an eye screening appointment as this type of diabetes usually goes away after the baby is born.

### **How often do you need eye screening during pregnancy?**

Patients who are pregnant should expect a minimum of three appointments.

- The first of the additional eye screening tests should take place before you are 13 weeks into the pregnancy, unless you have had a recent eye screening.
- Depending on whether there are signs of diabetic retinopathy or not, you may be offered an extra test between weeks 16 and 20 of the pregnancy.
- You should have an eye screening examination again when you are 28 weeks pregnant. In some cases, patients with diabetic retinopathy may be referred to the hospital services for further monitoring or treatment.
- Three months after your baby is born, you will have a final eye screening before reverting to regular eye screening appointments. However, if screening detects diabetic retinopathy, you will need further monitoring and/or treatment.



## What happens during an eye screening appointment?

Diabetic eye screening during pregnancy is the same as the routine diabetic eye screening process:

- we will confirm your identity;
- you may need eye drops – this makes the pupils larger so that the back of the eyes can be seen more clearly;
- we will take digital photos of your retinas.

## Eye drops

If you are given pupil dilating eye drops in the eye clinic, you are advised to wait until your vision is clear before driving or operating machinery. This usually takes about four hours.

To drive safely, you should be able to read a car number plate from the distance (20m) required by the Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Do:

- Bring your glasses or contact lenses that you wear with you to the appointment;
- Bring sunglasses to wear afterwards as eye drops can make your eyes more sensitive to light;
- Take prescribed medication as normal.

Don't:

- Fast – The eye screening test does not require you to fast beforehand.

## **When to expect your results**

We will send your results in a letter within three weeks of the eye screening appointment; we will also inform your GP of the results.

## **Possible results and what they mean**

Possible results from the diabetic eye screening are:

- No retinopathy (no changes were identified);
- Early signs of retinopathy (this is called background retinopathy which means that there are small changes at the back of either or both eyes);
- More serious retinopathy means that diabetes has caused some damage that will need checked or treated by an eye specialist.

## **What to do if you notice any vision changes**

Diabetic retinopathy screening is not a replacement for your regular eye examination. If you notice any changes to your sight, it is important that you immediately visit your optician, GP, or the Emergency Department. Do not wait until your next diabetic eye screening appointment is made.

Changes you may experience include:

- Trouble reading or seeing objects further away
- Sudden loss of vision
- Blurred vision
- Floaters (shapes or black lines floating in your field of vision).

## Further information

You can find more information on the websites below. Scan the QR code with your phone's camera or follow the web link. You can also contact the Northern Ireland Diabetic Eye Screening Programme on 028 9615 7600.



[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)



[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/diabetic-eye-screening](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/diabetic-eye-screening)



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