Diabetic Eye Screening

Northern Ireland Diabetic Eye Screening Programme

Slit lamp eye examination

Who is this leaflet for?

You will need to be examined for diabetic eye disease using an instrument called a slit lamp instead of a digital camera as we could not get a clear view of the back of your eyes using standard digital photography.

What is a slit lamp?

A slit lamp has two parts: a very bright source of light shone through a slit; and a microscope. It allows us to look at the individual parts of the eye in detail, especially the retina at the back of the eye. This will show whether there are any changes that may have been caused by diabetic retinopathy.

What will happen?

- Your appointment will last about 30 minutes.
- We put drops in your eyes to temporarily make your pupils larger. You may find the drops sting. They also slightly blur your vision.
- We ask you to sit in the examination chair and rest your chin and forehead on a support to steady your head.
- We will send a letter to you and your GP within 6 weeks to let you know your screening results.

Possible side effects

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

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

Next steps

If there are signs of serious changes we will refer you to a specialist eye doctor at your nearest hospital ophthalmology (eye) clinic.

If you have no changes (or mild diabetic changes) and we are still unlikely to get clear photographs of the back of your eyes with a standard digital camera we will invite you for another slit lamp appointment in 12 months.

Practical advice

To prepare for your appointment you should:

- bring all the glasses (spectacles) and contact lenses you wear along with lens solution for your contacts;
- bring sunglasses as your eyes can feel sensitive after having the eye drops.

You may want to bring someone with you to the appointment.

Please tell us if you have had cataracts removed recently or are going to have cataracts removed soon. This may enable us to get a clear view of your eyes using digital photography again. Contact the Diabetic Eye Screening Programme at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on 028 9615 7600.

HSC Public Health Agency

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