

# About diabetic retinopathy screening

## What is Diabetic RetinaScreen?

Diabetic RetinaScreen – The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme is a government-funded programme that offers free, regular diabetic retinopathy screening to people with diabetes aged 12 years and older.

## What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a common complication of diabetes which affects the small blood vessels in the lining at the back of the eye. This lining is called the retina. The retina helps to change what you see into messages that travel along the sight nerve to the brain. A healthy retina is necessary for good eyesight. Diabetic retinopathy can cause the blood vessels in the retina to leak or become blocked and damage your sight.

## What causes diabetic retinopathy?

When someone has diabetes, over time the blood vessels in the retina become thicker and the blood flowing in the blood vessels slows down. In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy will not affect the sight, but if the changes get worse, eventually the sight will be affected. Diabetic retinopathy is the name for two different changes in the retina which can affect the sight:

**Diabetic macular oedema** – where leaky blood vessels affect the part of the retina called the macula. If fluid leaks from these vessels and affects the centre of the macula, the sight will be affected. This is the more common eye change.

**Proliferative diabetic retinopathy** – where fragile new blood vessels form on the surface of the retina over time. These abnormal vessels can bleed or develop scar tissue causing severe loss of sight.

Both diabetic macular oedema and proliferative diabetic retinopathy can be treated and managed if they are detected early enough. If they are left untreated, sight problems will develop.

## Who is at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy?

Anybody with diabetes, either Type 1 or Type 2, is at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy. The longer you have had diabetes, the more likely you are to develop diabetic retinopathy.

## What is diabetic retinopathy screening?

Diabetic retinopathy eye screening uses specialised digital photography to look for changes that could affect your sight. Regular eye screening can detect diabetic retinopathy before you notice any changes in your sight.

## Why is diabetic retinopathy screening important?

Diabetic retinopathy may not have any symptoms in the early stages or may not affect your sight until the changes to your eyes are quite advanced. For this reason, regular eye screening is very important. Untreated diabetic retinopathy is the most common cause of sight loss in people of working age. When the condition is caught early, treatment is effective at reducing or preventing damage to your sight. Diabetic retinopathy eye screening is a key part of your diabetes care.

## How do I get a diabetic retinopathy eye screening appointment?

Step 1:

If the programme has been informed you were diagnosed with diabetes, you will be invited by letter to attend for screening.

Step 2:

When you get the letter you must call the Freephone number 1800 45 45 55.

Step 3:

When you phone you will be asked to provide consent to give the programme permission to receive, hold and share your personal details within the programme.

Step 4:

You will then be sent an appointment letter to attend for free diabetic retinopathy screening at a local screening centre.

If you are under the age of 16, you must be accompanied by your parent or guardian.

## What will happen during the eye screening appointment?

- Drops will be put in to your eyes to temporarily make your pupils larger. You may find the drops sting.
- Photographs of the back of your eyes are taken with a digital camera. The camera does not touch your eyes. Photographs are sent to an expert to review.
- The appointment will last about 30 minutes.

## Practical hints and tips for the day of your appointment

- If you wear glasses (distance glasses in particular) or contact lenses bring them along.
- Your eyes can feel sensitive after the eye drops – sunglasses may help.
- You should eat as normal, there is no need to fast.
- You should not drive or operate machinery after your eye screening appointment as the eye drops will affect your sight for up to nine hours.

## About your result

A letter about your result will be sent to you within three weeks of your appointment advising of the next steps. Most people will have a normal result. They will have no retinopathy or will have early changes to their retina (or eyes) and will be invited back for routine diabetic retinopathy eye screening.

You will be contacted for a further appointment if:

- The photographs are not clear enough to give a result.
- You have diabetic retinopathy which needs to be assessed.
- Other eye conditions not caused by diabetes are detected and need to be assessed.

Any follow up or further assessments of diabetic retinopathy that are recommended as part of the screening programme are free of charge.

## How can I prevent or reduce my risk of developing diabetic retinopathy?

- Control your blood sugar and blood pressure.
- Take your medication as prescribed.
- Attend your free diabetic retinopathy eye screening appointments.

## What should I do if I have concerns about my eyes between screening appointments?

If you have concerns about your eyes **do not** wait for your next eye screening appointment. You should contact your GP (family doctor), eye doctor or optician if your sight gets suddenly worse, or you may lose all or part of your sight.

## How reliable is diabetic retinopathy screening?

Like all screening tests, diabetic retinopathy screening is not 100 per cent reliable. Diabetic retinopathy screening looks only for diabetic retinopathy and may not detect other eye problems. This is why it is so important to see your GP (family doctor), eye doctor or optician if you have any concerns about your eyes or your sight. This is not a replacement for a regular eye exam as it looks only for diabetic retinopathy.

## Where did you get my contact details?

Diabetic RetinaScreen has a list of people with diagnosed diabetes. This information came from national health schemes, such as the Medical Card Scheme, Drugs Payment Scheme or Long Term Illness Scheme. In addition to these sources GPs can register people with diabetes with the programme.

## Is the information you hold about me safe?

Under the Data Protection Act, we keep your personal details and health records safe and private at all times.

## For more information

To find out more about Diabetic RetinaScreen **Freephone 1800 45 45 55** or visit our website at **[www.diabeticretinascreen.ie](http://www.diabeticretinascreen.ie)**