

DIABETES

If you have diabetes this does not necessarily mean that your sight will be affected, but there is a higher risk. Eye examinations for diabetics are paid for by the NHS. It is very important that diabetics attend for an examination at least once a year so that we can carefully check their eyes for any early signs of eye problems. If your diabetes is well controlled then you are less likely to have problems, or they may be less serious.

Why are regular eye examinations important?

Most sight loss from diabetic retinopathy can be prevented. Treatment for diabetic eye disease has improved over the years but its success depends on early detection and treatment. You may not realise that there is anything wrong with your eyesight, so regular eye checks are extremely important.

In order to get a good view of the back of the eyes, it may be necessary to use drops to enlarge the pupils of the eyes. Unfortunately this often causes temporary blurred vision. For this reason it is better not to drive to your appointment. The examination may take up to an hour because the drops take time to work.

How can diabetes affect the eye?

Your eye has a lens and an aperture (opening) at the front, which adjusts to bring objects into focus on the retina at the back of the eye. The retina is made up of delicate tissue that is sensitive to light, rather like the film in the camera.

At the centre of the retina is the macula, which is a small area about the size of a pinhead. This is most highly specialised part of the retina and it is vital because it enables you to see fine detail and read small print. The other parts of the retina give you side vision (peripheral vision). Filling the cavity of the eye in front of the retina is a clear jelly-like substance called the vitreous humour.

Diabetes can affect the eye in a number of ways. These usually involve the fine network of blood vessels in the retina, which start to leak - hence the term diabetic retinopathy. The leaking fluid from the blood vessels causes visual loss by damaging the retina. If the leakage is near the macula, this is of more concern.

The Importance of Early Treatment

Although your vision may be good, changes can be taking place to your retina that need treatment. And because most sight loss in diabetes is preventable:

Early diagnosis is vital

Have an eye examination every year

Do not wait until your vision has deteriorated to have an eye test.

Your optometrist, family doctor, diabetologist or ophthalmologist can examine for diabetic retinopathy. Photographs are sometimes used to detect abnormalities without any other form of test. If a problem is found you will be referred to a consultant ophthalmologist (a doctor specialising in eyes) at a hospital eye clinic.

Remember, however, that if your vision is getting worse, this does not necessarily mean you have diabetic retinopathy. It may simply be a problem that can be corrected by glasses. Not only can diabetes affect the health of the eyes, but it can also affect your spectacle prescription. If you notice any changes of your vision between your annual checks then don't hesitate to contact us, especially if the changes are sudden.

What is the Treatment?

Most sight-threatening diabetic problems can be prevented by laser treatment if it is given early enough. It is important to realise however, that laser treatment aims to save the sight you have - not to make it better. The laser, a beam of high intensity light, can be focused with extreme precision. It is used to seal the blood vessels that are leaking fluid into the retina.

If you would like any more information then please contact us.