

Oxfordshire Diabetic Eye Screening Service

What is diabetic retinopathy?

When diabetes affects the small blood vessels in the part of your eye called the retina, this is known as diabetic retinopathy. In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy will not affect your sight. However, if the changes get worse, your sight will be affected.

You are at increased risk of developing retinopathy if:

- you have had diabetes a long time
- your blood glucose level is poorly controlled
- you have high blood pressure
- you are pregnant
- you are taking insulin.

What is screening for diabetic retinopathy?

Screening means examining your eyes regularly to detect the specific changes of diabetic retinopathy that could affect your sight. The name for these changes is sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy. Screening is an effective way of detecting diabetic retinopathy as early as possible. If we find sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy, we will refer you to an eye specialist.

Why is it important to screen for diabetic retinopathy?

Untreated diabetic retinopathy is one of the most common causes of blindness in the working-age population in the UK. Diabetic retinopathy does not usually affect your sight until the changes are quite advanced.

Diabetic eye disease is quite common; it is estimated that 1 in 4 people with diabetes have some signs of diabetic eye disease within 5 years of being diagnosed. For most people, the changes are minor and do not cause problems with sight. Each year about 2 in every 100 people with diabetes will develop sight-threatening diabetic eye disease.

There is an effective treatment for diabetic retinopathy which can reduce the loss of sight and it is more effective the earlier it is carried out.

Useful facts about the Oxfordshire Diabetic Eye Screening Service (ODESS)

In Oxfordshire, diabetic eye screening is coordinated by the ODESS office at the Oxford Eye Hospital. All invitations and results are sent out from this office.

The screening is carried out by contracted optometrists based in the community or by technicians at your GP surgery. Each year you will receive a letter inviting you to attend for eye screening, using digital photography. Eye screening is an essential part of your diabetes care. Everyone 12 years and over will be invited to attend for eye screening.

If your GP practice has chosen to have eye screening carried out at the practice, you will need to phone the ODESS office to book your appointment.

If your GP practice has opted to have its patients screened by optometrists you will receive a list of the contracted optometrists with your invitation to attend screening. You will need to call one of the optometrists directly to book your appointment. You do not need to have a sight test at the same time as your eye screening if you do not want to.

What will happen at the appointment?

The screener will check your details and explain the procedure. Your distance vision (visual acuity) will be checked. Your eyes will then be dilated, using special eye drops that make your pupils large enough to take the photographs. The drops take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to work and afterwards your vision will be slightly blurred for several hours. This will affect your ability to drive for 2-4 hours.

The screener will take at least two photographs of the back of each eye (the retina). The camera does not come into contact with your eyes. You will see a flash of bright light each time a photograph is taken.

What do I need to take with me?

Please take your usual distance spectacles. It may also be useful to have sunglasses to wear after screening as it will appear very bright after having your eyes dilated.

What happens after my appointment?

All the images are sent to ODESS. The images are then checked by trained staff for any signs of diabetic retinopathy. Approximately 3-6 weeks after your appointment both you and your GP will receive the results of your eye screening.

Most people are then invited to attend screening the following year. However, sometimes the screener may not have been able to get good photographs of your eyes; in this case you will be referred to a slit lamp bio-microscopy clinic at the John Radcliffe Hospital for further assessment.

If your screening test results show diabetic retinopathy that may cause vision loss in the future you will be referred to the Oxford Eye Hospital for further assessment / tests by an Ophthalmologist.

I had eye photographs taken during my normal sight test. Do I still need to attend for eye screening?

Yes, you would still need to attend for eye screening. Most high street optometrists offer retinal photography as part of a routine eye test; this is not the same as eye screening.

How to contact us

If you have any questions about eye screening, please contact the **ODESS office** on **01865 231586** (8.30am - 4.30pm); email: odess@nhs.net.

Further information

The following websites contain further information:

ODESS: www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/eyehospital/ODESS

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Diabetic-retinopathy

English National Screening Programme for Diabetic Retinopathy:
www.retinalscreening.nhs.uk