

Diabetes and Your Eyes

Patient information leaflet

Why your eyes are examined every year

Diabetes affects the smallest blood vessels first, and the retina is the only place in the body where those vessels can be examined directly. Early changes cause no symptoms: central vision often remains perfectly normal while the circulation at the edges of the retina deteriorates. Annual examination is advised from the time type 2 diabetes is diagnosed, however good your control has been.

What the examination involves

- Vision measurement and eye pressure
- Dilating drops so the whole retina can be examined
- Wide-field photographs, giving a record that can be compared precisely year on year
- A scan of the macula (OCT) if any swelling is suspected

Dilating drops blur near vision and increase light sensitivity for four to six hours. Please arrange not to drive yourself home, and bring sunglasses.

What can happen to the retina

- Background changes. Small leaks and haemorrhages with no effect on vision. Monitored rather than treated.
- Macular swelling. Fluid gathers at the centre of the retina and blurs reading vision. Treated with injections given in clinic after thorough numbing.
- Advanced (proliferative) changes. Fragile new vessels grow and may bleed. Treated with laser to the outer retina, protecting central sight.

What you can do

Blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol all influence the retina, and improving them measurably slows these changes. Stopping smoking matters as much for the eyes as for the heart. None of this replaces the annual examination, because early changes are silent.

Do not wait for your next appointment if you notice

- Sudden painless loss of vision in one eye
- A sudden shower of floaters, or a dark shape moving across your vision
- A dark or empty patch in the centre of vision
- Distortion — straight lines appearing bent or wavy

Your findings are shared with your diabetes physician so that your care remains joined up. Reviewed by Dr. Aysun Yucel Gencoglu, MD, FEBO, FICO.

Notes for you from today's consultation