



NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme

Interval changes for patients at a lower risk of developing diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic eye screening has changed for people who are at lower risk of diabetic eye disease in England.

If your last two diabetic eye screenings found no sign of diabetic eye disease (diabetic retinopathy), you may now be safely screened every 2 years instead of every year as following expert advice it is safe to do so.

FAQs

What has changed for people at lower risk of diabetic retinopathy?

People who are at a lower risk of diabetic eye disease will now start to be invited for screening every 2 years instead of every year.

Why has this change been made?

Research shows that it is safe for people with no evidence of diabetic retinopathy on two consecutive screening occasions to be screened every 2 years.

This change has been recommended by the [UK National Screening Committee \(UK NSC\)](#). The changes have already been made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This change will help the NHS improve its service by reducing the number of appointments lower risk diabetics need to attend. Therefore, improving the service offered to them.

What does 'lower' risk of diabetic retinopathy mean?

You are at lower risk diabetic eye disease if your last two diabetic eye screenings found no sign of diabetic eye disease.

If I am not 'lower risk' and still being screened every year, does this mean I am at high risk of diabetic retinopathy?

Only people whose last two screenings found no sign of diabetic retinopathy will be screened every 2 years.

If the change does not apply to you now, this does not necessarily mean that you are at higher risk. Depending on the results of your future screening tests, you may be invited for screening every 2 years in the future.

If you are living with diabetes, you can reduce your risk of developing diabetic retinopathy by:

- Managing your diabetes – this is important to help you reduce your risk of eye problems in the future. You can find more information about diabetic retinopathy and how to manage your diabetes well at this link [nhs.uk/conditions/diabetic-retinopathy](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetic-retinopathy)
- Attending your diabetes appointments.
- Attending your diabetic eye screening appointments when invited. Diabetic eye screening is part of managing your diabetes.
- Attending your regular eye test with your optometrist or optician when you are due. Diabetic eye screening is different to the eye test that you have with the optometrist.
- Talk to your optometrist or optician if you notice any changes to your eyesight.

Who is eligible?

You will be invited for screening every 2 years if:

- you are aged 12 or over and have diabetes
and
- your last two diabetic eye screenings found no sign of diabetic retinopathy

Will all people at lower risk of diabetic retinopathy be screened every two years straight away?

No, the changes to screening intervals will be made gradually over a two-year period, starting from 1 October 2023. This is when people with diabetes will start to be informed of the change if they are eligible following their diabetic eye screening results.

What happens if I'm pregnant and diabetic?

If you are pregnant, you will be screened more often. This is because you may be at a higher risk of diabetic retinopathy during pregnancy. However, if you develop gestational diabetes you will not be screened.

Does the change apply to people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes?

Yes, the change applies whether you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

Does the change apply to children?

Yes, the change applies to anyone aged 12 or over whose last two screenings found no sign of diabetic eye disease (diabetic retinopathy).

Will I always be called every 2 years?

You will be invited for screening every 2 years as long as no changes are found at your

diabetic eye screening appointments. If changes are found, you will be screened more often.

What if I cannot make my appointment?

If you cannot make your screening appointment, let us know as soon as possible. We may be able to offer your appointment to someone else. You can call us to change the time, date and venue of your appointment.

What if I develop diabetic retinopathy between screening appointments?

Evidence shows that if no diabetic retinopathy is found, it is safe to be screened every 2 years.

If diabetic retinopathy does develop in the 2 years between your screening appointments, it will be found at an early stage, when you'll have the best chance of successful treatment.

What if I notice any changes to my eyesight or I am worried about my eyesight between screening appointments?

If you notice any changes to your eyesight, contact your local optometrist or optician straight away. Do not wait for your next screening appointment.

Will this change how often I usually have an eye test with the optometrist or optician?

No. Diabetic eye screening is different from the eye tests you have with the optometrist. To keep your eyes healthy, it's important that you see an optometrist or optician regularly as well as having diabetic eye screening.

What evidence is there to show that the change is safe?

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) is the independent scientific committee that makes screening recommendations to UK government ministers and the NHS. In 2016, the UK NSC recommended changing the screening interval from every year to every two years for people at low risk of diabetic eye disease. This was because a large study showed that it was safe to invite people in this lower risk group every two years rather than annually. The UK NSC's recommendation was based on the evidence presented in this document: [Extending diabetic eye screening intervals for people at low risk of developing sight threatening retinopathy: a consultation](#).

I have recently been diagnosed with diabetes. How often will I be screened?

To begin with, we will invite you for screening every year. If your last two diabetic eye screenings found no sign of diabetic eye disease (diabetic retinopathy), we will be able to invite you every 2 years in future.

How can I find out more about NHS diabetic eye screening?

To read more about diabetic eye screening and diabetic retinopathy visit:

[Diabetic eye screening - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

or

[Your guide to diabetic eye screening - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)