



## Factsheet

# Diabetic retinopathy

**Diabetic retinopathy is a complication caused by diabetes. It occurs when your blood sugar levels are consistently high, this then damages blood vessels in the eye. If this is not detected and treated it can lead to blindness.**

### What is it?

There are 3 different stages of diabetic retinopathy which differ in severity, these are:

- Background retinopathy – this is where bulges develop in the blood vessels, your sight is not affected at this stage, but treatment is vital to prevent worsening of the condition.
- Pre-proliferative retinopathy – bleeding into the retina can occur at this stage and the risk of sight loss is high. You should be offered examinations every 3 –6 months to monitor the progress of this.
- Proliferative retinopathy – at this stage scar tissue has formed on your retina which causes bleeding which leads to retinal detachment. There is a very high risk that your sight will be lost, and you should be offered treatment as soon as possible to combat this.

### Who is at risk?

Those who have type 1 or type 2 diabetes are at risk of developing this condition. According to diabetes.co.uk, 45.7% of people with type 1 diabetes have some form of retinopathy and in those with type 2 diabetes it is 25.3%. There is also a greater level of risk if you have had diabetes for a long time, you have high blood sugar, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. It is common in ages over 50 and a family history can also increase the likelihood of developing the condition.

### Symptoms

There may be many symptoms which you do not notice until your vision starts to deteriorate. However, some common symptoms include:

- Blurred vision

- Sudden loss in vision
- Double vision
- Eye pain
- Redness in the eye
- Floating shapes and dark spots in field of vision

If you have any of these symptoms it is important to get your eyes checked immediately, you should not wait until your screening appointment as early intervention is vital.

### How is it diagnosed?

A dilated eye exam should be undertaken by your doctor; eye drops are used to dilate the pupil to allow a better view into the eye. The doctor will then look for any abnormalities in blood vessels, swelling or deposits in the retina, growth of blood vessels, scar tissue and retinal detachment.

They may also use fluorescein angiography; this involves putting dye into the eye and taking pictures in order to see any abnormal blood vessels. An optical coherence tomography (OCT) may also be undertaken; this shows cross-sectional images of the retina in order to determine the thickness of the retina which helps to see if there is any fluid in the retinal tissue.

### How is it treated?

Treatment is often dependent on the stage of retinopathy. Background retinopathy has no real treatment, you will have to have regular screening examinations and are often encouraged to keep your blood sugar and blood pressure levels lowered. As the retinopathy develops in severity laser treatment can be carried out to shrink the abnormal blood vessels. You may also be given medication to try prevent the growth of blood vessels. In advanced cases you may have to undergo a vitrectomy; this is the removal of the vitreous gel which fills the inside of the eye.

### What issues can arise that might lead to a negligence claim?

Issues arise when there are delays in diagnosis. Doctors may ignore a particular symptom or fail to carry out the appropriate examinations in a timely manner or appropriately. This then increases the risk of retinopathy developing to a stage in which sight loss is irreversible.

### How can we help?

If you have suffered injury from a negligent delay in diagnosis or substandard treatment of retinopathy then you may be entitled to bring a claim for compensation. Compensation can assist with loss of earnings, care and assistance and any aids and equipment you may need to help adjust to life with this condition. Our specialist lawyers are happy to discuss any concerns you have had regarding your care and advise you on the options you have.

### Charities/organisations

For more information and support regarding diabetic retinopathy and sight loss go to the following webpages:

[www.diabetes.co.uk](http://www.diabetes.co.uk)

[www.fightforsight.org.uk](http://www.fightforsight.org.uk)

[www.opensight.org.uk](http://www.opensight.org.uk)



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