

Managing eye health in people with diabetes - strategies for health professionals

Diabetes mellitus can cause a variety of eye problems, the most prevalent being diabetic retinopathy, which is the most common cause of blindness among people of working age. However, most cases of diabetic retinopathy are avoidable. As a health professional you have an important role in supporting people with diabetes to manage their eye health.

1 Control diabetes

Support the person with diabetes to optimise the control of their blood glucose, blood pressure and blood lipids in order to avoid complications such as diabetic retinopathy.

2 Personalise management

Develop individual plans that suit each person's needs and are appropriate to the resources available. Medication such as anti-hypertensive and/ or lipid-lowering drugs should be used to treat hypertension and dyslipidaemia, and when combined with lifestyle change, may slow the progression of diabetic retinopathy.

3 Encourage lifestyle modification

Healthy eating and an improved understanding of the relationship between food, exercise and blood glucose levels are essential to achieving good metabolic control in people with diabetes.

4 Facilitate social support

Ensure regular contact with health professionals and supportive peers to assist patients manage their health and health care. Encouraging family-based psychosocial support (where available), such as weekly meal planning, may help to improve diabetes management.

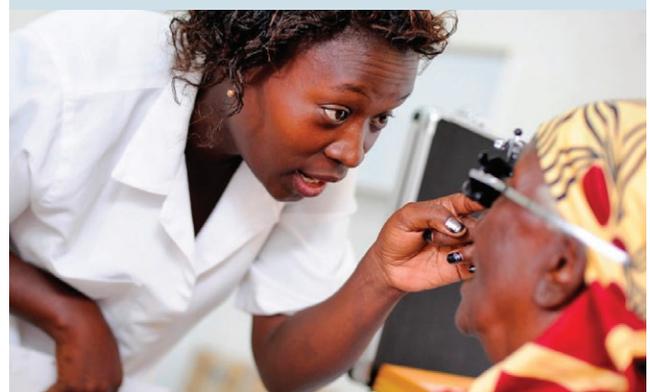
5 Regular eye examinations & timely treatment

Ensure that the person with diabetes has an eye examination at diagnosis of diabetes, then **a regular eye examination, every one to two years**. This is essential to identify the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. Timely treatment can prevent vision loss and even improve vision for many people. The decision to undergo treatment should be made jointly by both the person with diabetes and the health professional.

Clinical tip: key risks

The major risk factors for developing and progression of diabetic retinopathy are:

- duration of diabetes
- high glucose levels
- high blood pressure



For more information, download the full document,
'Diabetes Eye Health: a guide for health professionals' <http://www.idf.org/eyehealth>

Detecting diabetic retinopathy in patients with diabetes

Diabetic retinopathy results from damage to the small blood vessels of the retina. Initially diabetic retinopathy may cause few or mild symptoms. Regular eye examinations are the only way to determine the condition of the retina and take appropriate action. Below are three key actions health professionals can take to detect diabetic retinopathy in people with diabetes.

1 Medical history

Complete a medical history to collect information about; their duration of diabetes, past glycaemic control (HbA1c if possible), current medications (especially insulin, blood glucose-lowering medication, anti-hypertensive and lipid lowering drugs), systemic history (renal disease, systemic hypertension, serum lipid levels and pregnancy); ocular history and current visual symptoms.

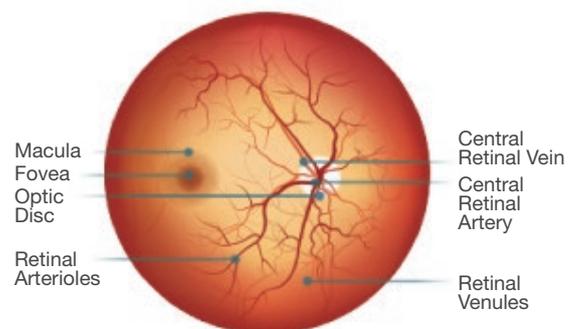
2 Regular eye examinations

Conduct a visual acuity test and retinal examination adequate for diabetic retinopathy classification. Retinal screening can be performed using an ophthalmoscope or retinal photography. **Eye examinations should be performed every one or two years.** Discuss the clinical findings with the patient, using their retinal image or a diagram.

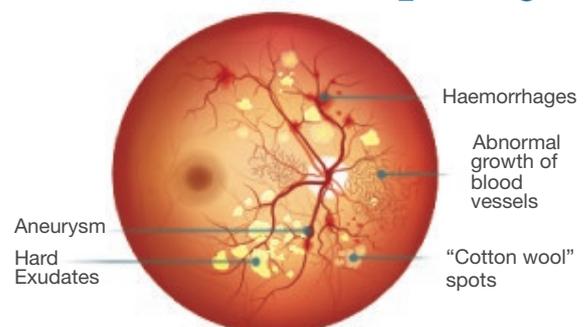
3 Take action if Diabetic Retinopathy is detected

If diabetic retinopathy has been detected (see diagram), refer the patient to an eye specialist for timely treatment. Discuss with the patient management of their blood glucose, blood pressure and blood lipids along with dietary and lifestyle changes and identify support, if available.

Normal retina



Diabetic retinopathy



Source: Singapore Eye Research Institute

Diabetic Retinopathy Resources

To learn more about diabetes, please visit: www.idf.org

To learn more about diabetic retinopathy, please visit: <http://www.hollows.org/au/eye-health/diabetic-retinopathy>

Or: http://www.icoph.org/enhancing_eyecare/diabetic_eyecare.html

For more information, download the full document, 'Diabetes Eye Health: a guide for health professionals' <http://www.idf.org/eyehealth>