

Diabetic Retinopathy: Why Screening Matters

The retina plays an important role in your vision.

The retina is a thin nerve membrane that detects light entering your eye, sending signals to your brain to help you see.

But sometimes when you have diabetes, certain problems can cause damage to the retina.

When that happens, it's called diabetic retinopathy.

Over time, having high blood sugar can damage the blood vessels, and that can lead to retinopathy.

Other things that put you at risk include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and kidney disease.

Retinopathy can get worse if blood sugar levels stay high.

And that can lead to poor vision or even blindness.

But there are lots of things you can do to help prevent retinopathy or keep it from getting worse.

Keeping your blood sugar and blood pressure in their target ranges can help you avoid it or slow the damage.

That's why screening is important.

If retinopathy is caught early, there are treatment options that can help prevent or delay vision loss.

You can get screened for retinopathy during a complete eye exam by a trained eye professional.

The exam checks for any vision problems and checks your vision at different distances.

Your eyes will also be dilated to check for signs of retinopathy.

Your doctor will use eye drops to widen, or dilate, your pupils.

This makes it easier for your doctor to check your retina.

You can also be screened using retinal photography if you live in an area where you don't have access to a trained eye professional.

This can usually be done in a doctor's office, and then the images are read by a qualified eye care professional.

Talk to your doctor about where you can find retinal photography screening if it's needed.

Now that you know why screening is important, let's talk about how often it should be done.

If you have type 1 diabetes, your doctor will recommend you get a screening within 5 years of your diagnosis.

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If you have type 2 diabetes, you'll get a complete eye exam when you are diagnosed.

If there are signs of retinopathy, plan to get screened once each year.

If there's no sign of retinopathy and your blood sugar is well-managed, your doctor will recommend you have a screening every 1 or 2 years.

Now, if you're pregnant or planning to get pregnant, it's important to talk to your doctor about screening.

Retinopathy can get worse during pregnancy.

But your doctor can talk to you about ways you can decrease that risk.

Remember, screening can help you prevent retinopathy or keep it from getting worse.

And if you have any questions, you can always talk to your doctor.