

WHAT DOES DIABETES HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR EYES?



DEAR PATIENT,

Diabetes mellitus may cause damage to the retina of your eyes. Your doctor will describe this condition as diabetic retinopathy or diabetic maculopathy. Both can lead to a worsening of your eyesight. For this reason preventive action and treatment are important.

▶ RISK FACTORS AND WARNING SIGNS

Frequently, you don't notice any changes to your eyes at first. A number of factors can, however, aggravate damage to the retina (risk factors) and some signs may indicate this (warning signs).

There is a higher risk for your eyes when:

- your diabetes was not diagnosed for a long time.
- your diabetes is poorly controlled.
- in addition to diabetes, you also suffer from high blood pressure.

You should take it as a warning when:

- you start having problems reading.
- your vision is distorted or blurred.
- your colour vision is impaired.
- you suddenly see spots or floaters in front of your eyes.

▶ WHEN SHOULD YOU GO AND SEE AN EYE DOCTOR?

A visit is recommended:

- immediately after you are diagnosed as having diabetes.
- once a year as long as no damage to the retina has been observed.
- at shorter intervals when the retina is damaged.
- immediately when warning signs occur like, for instance, a worsening of your eyesight, difficulty reading, blurring or spots in front of the eyes.

▶ EXAMINATIONS

During the examination of the back of the eye, your eye doctor dilates the pupils with eye drops in order to be able to examine your retina more thoroughly.

In specific cases a special camera is used to examine blood circulation in the back of the eyes. In this case, a dye is injected into one of your veins.

Your eye doctor examines your visual acuity using eye charts which you are asked to read out loud from a specified distance.

Your eye doctor uses a special microscope to examine the front of your eyes.

PATIENT INFORMATION

▶ Diabetes and Your Eyes

▶ TREATMENT

Treatment can be divided into two areas:
Your family doctor or your specialist in internal medicine treats your diabetes and high blood pressure. Your eye doctor treats any changes to your eyes.

The type of eye treatment depends on the stage of the disease.

When your blood sugar is well controlled, damaged parts of the retina can be treated with a laser.

Any bleeding and growths in the eyes can be removed with the help of an operation called a vitrectomy (removal of the vitreous gel).

Special visual aids are available to maintain your ability to read.

Fresh damage to the retina may be an indication that other vessels in your body are affected, too. Further examinations may be necessary.

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- attend patient education courses for people suffering from diabetes.
- always keep your appointments with your family doctor.
- control your blood sugar levels regularly.

You can attend a diabetes management programme (DMP Diabetes). The goal is to co-ordinate care by your family doctor and specialists. Talk to your doctor about this option.

▶ MORE INFORMATION

This Patient Information is based on the latest scientific findings and sums up the most important points from the Patient Guideline “Retinal Complications in conjunction with Diabetes”.

Other useful links

PatientenLeitlinie “Netzhautkomplikationen bei Diabetes”: (Patient Guideline “Retinal Complications in conjunction with Diabetes”): www.versorgungsleitlinien.de/patienten

Self-help organisations and co-operation partners involved in the Patient Guideline
www.patienten-information.de/patientenbeteiligung/selbsthilfe, www.azq.de/pf

Self-help contact

You can find out from NAKOS (national contact and information office for the encouragement and support of self-help groups) where there is a self-help group in your area: www.nakos.de, Tel.: 030 3101 8960

Patient Guidelines

Patient Guidelines translate the treatment recommendations in medical guidelines into everyday language that can be understood by ordinary people. They provide important background information on the causes, examination methods and treatment of a disease. The BÄK (German Medical Association), the KBV (National Associations of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians) and the AWMF (Association of Scientific Medical Societies) working group are the co-ordinators of the programme for the development of medical guidelines (“National Medical Guidelines”) and the respective patient versions.

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Responsible for the content:
German Agency for Quality in Medicine (ÄZQ)
Joint institution of BÄK and KBV
Tel.: 030 4005-2500 • Fax: 030 4005-2555
Email/Ansprechpartner: mail@patinfo.org
www.patinfo.org
www.aezq.de



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