Screening for diabetic eye disease during pregnancy

This leaflet explains about the South East London Diabetic Eye Screening Programme. It explains why you need to have more frequent screening tests during pregnancy, when you need to have these tests, what they involve and possible results.

About this condition
Diabetic retinopathy is a condition caused when diabetes affects the small blood vessels in the retina at the back of the eye. Everyone with diabetes is offered eye screening annually, but when you are pregnant you need to be screened more frequently because the risk of serious eye problems is greater.

What does having this test involve?
Diabetic eye screening in pregnancy is the same as routine eye screening when you have diabetes. Screening staff will record your details and level of sight. They will put drops in your eyes to make your pupils larger so the retinas can be seen more clearly. They then take digital photographs of your retinas. If the images are not clear enough you will be referred to an eye specialist for a different test.

How often and when do I need these tests during pregnancy?
Your first additional eye screening test should take place before you are 13 weeks pregnant (unless you have had your annual screening very recently).

If there are any signs of early diabetic retinopathy at your first test, you will be offered an additional test between 16-20 weeks.

Everyone should have an eye screening test again at 28 weeks of pregnancy. If diabetic retinopathy has not progressed at this point (which is the case for the majority of patients) you will be returned to eye screening at this point.

Can this screening test harm me or my baby?
The photograph is painless and the camera does not come into contact with the eye. The eye drops may sting for a few seconds and cause blurred vision for 2 to 6 hours after the test. They are commonly used in pregnancy across the national screening programme. Take all your usual spectacles with you.
Take sunglasses with you to wear home, as everything may look very bright after the screening test. Arrange to use public transport or get a lift for the journey home. You should not drive after screening as the eye drops can blur vision.

Very rarely, the drops can cause a sudden, dramatic rise in pressure within the eye. In the unlikely event that you experience severe pain or discomfort in the eye, you should return to the eye unit or go to an Emergency Department (A&E) You will be given an information sheet about this when you leave your screening appointment: Advice after receiving your dilation eye drops.

**Do I need this test?**
This test is strongly recommended if you already had diabetes before getting pregnant. Eye screening is a part of managing your diabetes and diabetic retinopathy is treatable, especially if it is caught early.

**Possible results**
If you have the screening test, possible results are
- No retinopathy
- Early signs of retinopathy
- More serious retinopathy that requires referral to a specialist.

If your test shows early signs of retinopathy, your health professional will give you advice about looking after your diabetes during pregnancy and you will be invited for additional screening tests during your pregnancy. If the test shows you have referable retinopathy you will receive an appointment with an eye specialist.

If you are a smoker, seek help to stop or at least cut down. If you would like to give up smoking, please speak to your nurse or call the Trust stop smoking service on 020 7188 0995, or call the NHS Smoking Helpline on 0300 123 1044.

**Getting my results**
A letter will be sent to you, your GP and the antenatal service caring for you during pregnancy within six weeks following your screening appointment.

**Do I need to have eye screening if I have gestational diabetes?**
Generally only people who have had diabetes before they become pregnant need to have eye screening.

However, if the doctors caring for you during pregnancy feel you may actually have Type 2 diabetes which has been diagnosed during pregnancy, they will refer you to us for screening. After you are pregnant if you are told that you do not have diabetes, please contact us to let us know as you will not need to have any further eye tests with us. All patients diagnosed with Type 1 and 2 diabetes should continue to attend for annual screening but people who were diagnosed with gestational (during pregnancy) diabetes only do not need to attend.
Information for patients who live outside of South East London

Screening programmes are organised based on geographical boundaries, and each area in the UK is covered by a local programme. The South East London Screening Programme covers patients who are registered with a GP in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich.

Because a number of our screening locations are at hospital sites where many patients will receive their antenatal care, we are happy to see women from out of the usual programme boundaries during pregnancy if this means they find it easier to attend their appointments. The midwife or doctor caring for you during pregnancy can refer you to us.

If you would rather continue to have your screening done locally, please let your local programme know that you are pregnant and they will arrange to see you more frequently. If we screen you during your pregnancy we will let your local programme know of your results and will discharge you back to their care afterwards.

Contact us

South East London Diabetic Eye Screening Programme.
We offer screening at hospital and community clinic sits across South East London.
Please see our website for more details on our clinics [www.gstt.nhs.uk/seldesp](http://www.gstt.nhs.uk/seldesp)
Our administration team can be contacted by phone or email and will be able to book or change an appointment for you. If you have any queries they can’t help with they will pass this on to an appropriate member of the team.

**Telephone: 020 7188 1979** (Monday to Saturday 9am-4.30pm)
Email: [gst-tr.seldesp.admin@nhs.net](mailto:gst-tr.seldesp.admin@nhs.net)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)
**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**Your comments and concerns**
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS)  e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints)  e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

**Language and accessible support services**
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815  e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

**NHS 111**
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

**NHS website**
Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

w: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust**
Members of Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319  e: members@gstt.nhs.uk  w: [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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**Was this leaflet useful?**
We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, w: [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets), or e: [patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk)