

Research to help us reduce sight loss in people living with diabetes

This highlight notice invites researchers to apply for funding for research that aims to reduce the risk of sight loss in people living with diabetes. This will improve our understanding of who is at highest risk and provide better and more personalised treatment and care.

[Diabetic retinopathy](#) is an eye complication that occurs when high blood sugar levels and blood pressure lead to damage in your retina (the back of your eye). If not treated, retinopathy can progress to more advanced stages and the risk of sight loss increases.

Each year in the UK, over 1,700 people living with diabetes experience serious problems with their sight. Increased pressure on hospital eye services during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to longer wait times for eye screening and treatment, causing more people to experience sight loss. But this is preventable.

The [Diabetes Research Steering Groups](#) have identified the need for research to:

- Identify people at higher risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, so we can act earlier and prevent people from reaching advanced stages
- Identify the best treatments for people with diabetic retinopathy, and determine when a treatment isn't working and consider other treatment options
- Develop new treatments for advanced stages of diabetic retinopathy that currently have no treatment options
- Improve models of care so people living with diabetes can be screened and treated more efficiently before avoidable sight loss occurs

It's very unlikely that someone with diabetes will suddenly wake up with sight loss – the process is gradual. Research in this area could improve our ability to detect and treat diabetic retinopathy before it gets worse, so we can prevent avoidable sight loss for people living with diabetes.

Alison Blackburn, who lives with type 1 diabetes and sight loss, said:

“After having diabetes for 63 years and being registered blind for 27 years, I have personal experience of how sight loss can impact various parts of life. The saying that prevention is better than treatment is particularly apt when it comes to sight loss and should be of utmost importance. Identifying those that are likely to experience sight loss could bring numbers down, limiting the many impacts that sight loss has on a very stretched national health service. A sick eye is often a sign of a sick body and preventing sight loss can help to prevent further complications, improve the ability of people to manage their diabetes, prevent stress, and improve mental health.”