

Retinopathy

Sickle cell retinopathy is a condition that can cause permanent damage to the eyes. It is more common in patients with the Hemoglobin SC type of sickle cell disease. However, it can be found in any patient with sickle cell disease.

What causes sickle cell retinopathy?

Sickle cell retinopathy happens when sickled red blood cells block the tiny blood vessels in the back of the eyes. The eye then makes new, thinner blood vessels to go around the blocked vessels. These new vessels are weaker and can burst. This can cause bleeding into the eye. Sometimes the retina (the seeing part of the eye) is damaged and comes loose. Permanent damage or blindness can happen if retinopathy is not caught in time.

What are the symptoms of sickle cell retinopathy?

- Usually there are no symptoms in the early stages.
- Damage has already happened when vision problems occur. The damage and vision problems may not get better, even after treatment.
- **Screening for early stages of sickle cell retinopathy is very important!**

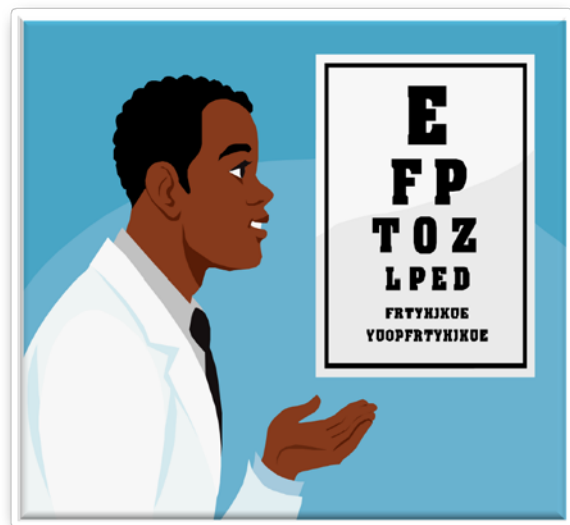
What is a screening eye exam?

Eye examinations by a special eye doctor (Ophthalmologist or Optometrist) need to be done **once a year starting at age 10 years.**

- The doctor will put drops in the eyes to dilate (open up) the pupils.
- This helps the doctor look at the retina with a special machine.
- Always tell the eye doctor about your sickle cell disease so they can look for retinopathy.

How is sickle cell retinopathy treated?

If caught early, most problems can be treated by the eye doctor. Laser treatments may be used to correct some problems.



You can schedule your child's eye appointment at the St. Louis Children's Hospital Eye Center by calling 314.454.6026