

Cataract

What is a cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye. It can be compared to a window that is frosted or "fogged" with steam.

There are many misconceptions about cataract. Cataract is:

- not a film over the eye;
- not caused by overusing the eyes;
- not spread from one eye to the other;
- not a cause of irreversible blindness.

Common symptoms of cataract include:

- a painless blurring of vision;
- glare, or light sensitivity;
- frequent eyeglass prescription changes;
- double vision in one eye;
- needing brighter light to read;
- poor night vision;
- fading or yellowing of colors.

The amount and pattern of cloudiness within the lens can vary. If the cloudiness is not near the center of the lens, you may not be aware that a cataract is present.

What causes cataract?

The most common type of cataract is related to aging of the eye. Other causes of cataract include:

- family history;
- medical problems, such as diabetes;
- injury to the eye;
- medications, such as steroids;
- long-term, unprotected exposure to sunlight;
- previous eye surgery;
- unknown factors.

How is a cataract detected?

A thorough eye examination by your ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) can detect the presence and extent of a cataract, as well as any other conditions that may be causing blurred vision or other symptoms.

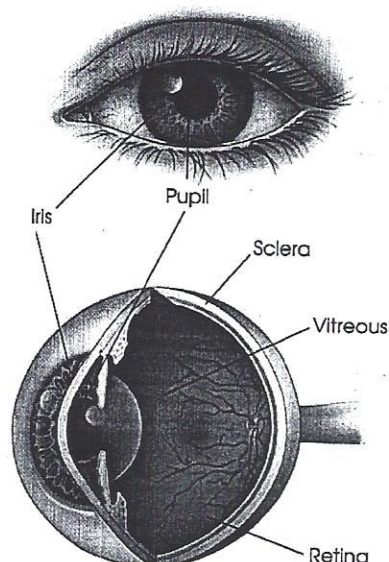
There may be other reasons for visual loss in addition to the cataract, particularly problems involving the retina or optic nerve. If these problems are present, removal of the cataract may improve vision, but perfect sight may not be possible.

If such conditions are severe, removal of the cataract may not result in any improvement in vision. Your ophthalmologist can tell you how much visual improvement is likely.

How fast does a cataract develop?

How quickly the cataract develops varies among individuals, and may vary even between the two eyes. Most age-related cataracts progress gradually over a period of years.

Other cataracts, especially in younger people and people with diabetes, may progress rapidly over a few months. It is not possible to predict exactly how fast cataracts will develop in any given person.



How is cataract treated?

Surgery is the only way a cataract can be removed. However, if symptoms from a cataract are mild, a change of glasses may be all that is needed for you to function more comfortably.

There are no medications, dietary supplements, exercises or optical devices that have been shown to prevent or cure cataracts.

Protection from excessive sunlight may help prevent or slow the progression of cataracts. Sunglasses that screen out ultraviolet (UV) light rays or regular eyeglasses with a clear, anti-UV coating offer this protection.

Anatomy of the eye

When should surgery be done?

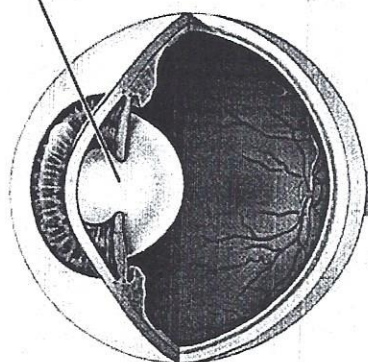
Cataract surgery should be considered when cataracts cause enough loss of vision to interfere with daily activities.

It is not true that cataracts need to be "ripe" before they can be removed.

Cataract surgery can be performed when your visual needs require it. You must decide if you can see to do your job and drive safely or, if you can read and watch TV in comfort. Can you see well enough to perform daily tasks, such as cooking, shopping, yard work or taking medications without difficulty?

Based on your symptoms, you and your ophthalmologist should decide together when surgery is appropriate.

Clouded lens (Cataract)



What can I expect from cataract surgery?

Over 1.4 million people have cataract surgery each year in the United States, and 95% of those surgeries are performed with no complications.

During cataract surgery, which is usually performed under local or topical anesthesia as an outpatient procedure, the cloudy lens is removed from the eye. In most cases, the focusing power of the natural lens is restored by replacing it with a permanent intraocular lens implant.

Your ophthalmologist performs this delicate surgery using a microscope, miniature instruments and other modern technology.

In some people who have cataract surgery, the natural capsule that supports the intraocular lens will become cloudy. Laser surgery is used to open this cloudy capsule, restoring the clear vision.

You will have to take eyedrops as your ophthalmologist directs. Your surgeon will check your eye several times to make sure it is healing properly.

Cataract surgery is a highly successful procedure. Improved vision is the result in over 95% of cases, unless there is a

problem with the cornea, retina, optic nerve or other structures. It is important to understand that complications can occur during or after the surgery, some severe enough to limit vision. If you experience even the slightest problem after cataract surgery, your ophthalmologist will want to hear from you immediately.

Conclusion

Cataracts are a common cause of poor vision, particularly for the elderly, but they are treatable. Your ophthalmologist can tell you whether cataract or some other problem is the cause for vision loss, and help you decide if cataract surgery is appropriate for you.