

CATARACT

American Academy of Ophthalmology

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 yellowed.

There are many misconceptions about cataract. Cataract is not:

- a film over the eye;
- caused by overusing the eyes;
- spread from one eye to the other;
- a cause of irreversible blindness.

Common symptoms of cataract include:

- a painless blurring of vision;
- glare, or light sensitivity;
- poor night vision;
- double vision in one eye;
- needing brighter light to read;
- 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. Causes of cataract include:

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

How is cataract detected?

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

Problems with other parts of the eye (eg, cornea, retina, optic nerve) can be responsible for vision loss and may prevent you from having much or any improvement in your vision after

cataract surgery. If improvement in your vision is unlikely, cataract removal may not be recommended. 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 even be different between the two eyes. Most age-related cataracts progress gradually over a period of years.

Other cataract, especially in younger people and people with diabetes, may progress rapidly over a short period of time. 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 of cataract are not bothering you very much, surgery may not be needed. Sometimes a simple change in your eyeglasses prescription may be helpful.

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

Protection from excessive sunlight may help 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.

When should surgery be done?

Surgery should be considered when the cataracts cause enough loss of vision to interfere with your daily activities.

It is not true that cataracts need to be “ripe” before they can be removed, or that they need to be removed just because they are present.

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.

What can I expect from cataract surgery?

Over 1.4 million people have cataract surgery each year in the United States, and more than 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 many people who have cataract surgery, the natural capsule that supports the intraocular lens becomes cloudy. Laser surgery is used to open this cloudy capsule, restoring clear vision.

You will have to take eyedrops as your ophthalmologist directs. Your surgeon will check you 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 decreased vision, particularly for the elderly, but they are treatable. Your ophthalmologist can tell you whether cataract or soe other problem is the cause of your vision loss and can help you decide if cataract surgery is appropriate for you.

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