

How Are Cataracts Treated?

Once cataracts have been diagnosed by one of our Optometric Physicians as the cause of vision loss, options will be discussed with the patient. Cataract surgery is the only proven method of removing cataracts; although, there is generally no harm in not having them removed. In early cases, simply changing the glasses prescription may improve vision enough to allow the patient to function well. No medications, eye drops or exercises have been scientifically proven to reverse the effects of cataracts on vision.

What Is Involved In Cataract Surgery?

If cataract surgery is elected by the patient, our Optometrist will work closely with the Ophthalmic Surgeon to ensure the best outcome possible. After discussing the options with the patient, a referral is made to a surgeon who will first perform a pre-operative consultation including dilation of the pupils to assess the degree of cataract formation. Measurements of the shape and length of the eyeball are taken to calculate the proper power for the intraocular implant. A medical clearance will also be obtained from the patient's family doctor, if needed.

The surgical procedure itself usually only lasts 10 to 20 minutes and is done under local anesthesia with a mild sedative allowing the patient to be alert but very relaxed throughout the process. There is typically no pain associated with the surgery, and only a mild foreign body sensation during the post-operative recovery period. Vision usually starts to improve as early as the next day after the procedure, and there are very few restrictions on the patient's activities after the surgery. Eye drops are used for a few weeks afterwards to make the recovery as comfortable as possible. Sunglasses are necessary (and very helpful) after cataract removal, and a final glasses prescription change, if needed, is made 3 to 4 weeks following the surgery. Once the post-operative period is over, eye health evaluations are done once or twice a year looking for long term complications such as glaucoma or after-cataract.

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Cataracts

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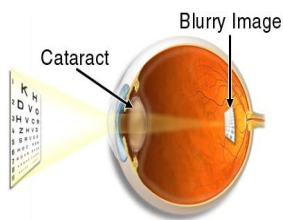
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What is a Cataract?

To understand cataracts, it is helpful to understand how the eye works. The eye is composed of different elements that combine together as in a camera to allow us to see. Like a camera, there is a focusing system consisting of the cornea and crystalline lens and the film which is the retina. A cataract is a clouding of the crystalline lens. The lens is the clear



tissue located inside the pupil which is the dark circular opening in the middle of the iris (the colored part of the eye). The lens works with the transparent cornea,

which covers the eye's surface, to focus images on the retina at the back of the eye. When the lens becomes cloudy, light cannot pass to the retina properly, and vision becomes blurred, like having a dirty or scratched lens on a camera.

Although cataracts result from many conditions, the most frequent cause is the natural aging process. Eye injury, certain eye diseases, some systemic medications and health problems such as diabetes increase the risk for cataract development. Exposure to the sun and smoking also promote cataract development.

What Are The Symptoms?

In the early stages of development, there may be no symptoms associated with cataracts. As the clear protein of the crystalline lens matures, some of the clarity is lost and cloudy areas form inside the lens. Depending on the amount of clouding and the location, the patient may not be aware of any loss of vision. Very often, the first signs of cataract are difficulties with night vision that progress gradually over



the years. As cataracts worsen, there is a subtle loss of contrast so that more light is required for reading, and colors may not seem as vibrant. Frequent changes in glasses

prescriptions are often associated with cataract progression. Occasionally, other symptoms such as haloes around lights, starburst effects, and double vision or ghost-like shadows are warning signs of cataracts. Cataracts usually continue to progress, but do not have to be removed unless the patient is visually compromised. Eye doctors used to say that the cataract had to be "ripe" before it could be removed but today the accepted time is when the person cannot see well enough to do the things that they enjoy and an eye-glass prescription change will not help.

How Are They Detected?

Cataracts can only be detected through a thorough, dilated eye examination. An evaluation of visual acuity, intraocular pressure (for risk of glaucoma), and dilated fundus exam (viewing the



inside of the eye with lights and special magnifying lenses), along with assessment of pertinent health history are all necessary to properly diagnose vision problems resulting from cataracts.

Once the diagnosis of cataracts is made, one of our Optometric Physicians will discuss the effects cataracts are having on your vision. Other conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, and retinal disease must be ruled out to determine if cataracts are the cause of vision loss.

Can They Recur?

One of the most common questions about cataracts is "can they recur if removed?". Once removed surgically, cataracts will not recur. However, there is a condition called posterior capsular opacification or after-cataract that is very common. Approximately one-third of patients will need a YAG laser capsulotomy after cataract surgery to remove this after-cataract. This laser procedure may be done as early as 3 months after cataract surgery or any time thereafter.