
Cataract

What is Cataract?

A cataract is a clouding and hardening of the normally clear, transparent and flexible lens of the eyes. The cloudy lens blocks light coming into the eye, resulting in blurred vision. Cataracts are associated with a change in the chemical composition of the lens.

A cataract is not a film over the eye, is not caused by overuse of the eyes, and is not related to cancer. Cataracts do not spread from eye to eye, although they may occur in both eyes.

Who Is at Risk?

Cataracts are a normal part of the aging process. Over 50% of persons above the age of 65 have them to varying degrees. Cataracts are the most common cause of blindness in Asian Americans. Factors that can increase the risk for cataracts include:

- Family history
- Diabetes
- Eye injuries
- Certain medications, such as steroids
- Smoking
- Long term, unprotected exposure to sunlight

Symptoms

Cataracts usually develop gradually over many years and are often painless. A person may not notice

any changes in vision if the clouding is small and not in the center of the lens. Cataracts are often not visible until they are quite advanced.

Common symptoms are:

- Blurred or double vision
- Sensitivity to bright light and glare
- Changes in color perception
- Frequent changes in prescription glasses
- Decreased night vision
- Halos around lights

Prevention

Although there is no known prevention for developing cataracts, the following recommendations may slow down its onset or progression:

- Wear sunglasses labeled 100% UV absorption to reduce over exposure to sunlight.
- Keep diabetes under control.
- Eat foods high in beta-carotene, Vitamin C and E (mostly from fruits, dark green leafy and deep yellow vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds).

Detection

An eye specialist (ophthalmologist) can detect the development of cataracts during a comprehensive eye exam. Eye exams are recommended every 2 years for persons over 60.

Treatment

When a cataract is small, increasing the power of the prescription lenses may help improve vision to a certain degree. When the cataract becomes too dense, surgery to remove the cloudy lens is necessary especially if it is affecting vision and everyday activities.

Cataract surgery is done under local anesthesia on an outpatient basis and takes less than an hour. Over 90% of patients experience improved vision after surgery. Cataracts are removed using one of the following surgical procedures:

1. Extracapsular Surgery

A small incision is made on the outer coating of the lens (lens capsule). The cloudy lens is removed and replaced with a permanent, plastic, artificial lens (intraocular lens).

2. Phacoemulsification

A newer technique using ultrasound waves to break up the cataract. The pieces are then removed with a special instrument through a tiny incision about 1/8" long. Often, a foldable intraocular lens is injected into the eye through the small incision. Stitches (sutures) are not needed.

In about half of the people who have cataract surgery, the lens capsule will become cloudy. Laser surgery is used to restore clear vision.

Cataracts are treatable and cataract surgeries have a high success rate. If you are experiencing vision problems, consult your ophthalmologist.

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