

Cole Eye Institute

Cataracts and Cataract Surgery

What is a cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of the natural lens of the eye (behind the iris), usually as a result of normal changes with aging.

What are the symptoms of a cataract?

The initial symptom is usually glare when light is shining towards the eyes. This symptom progresses, so that vision is blurred even under good lighting conditions. Sometimes near vision becomes the most impaired, sometimes distance and sometimes both. Occasionally double vision occurs in an eye with cataract.

What is the treatment for a cataract?

The only treatment for cataract is surgery (usually phacoemulsification with lens implantation). The patient is given a local pain control medication (anesthesia) and can leave the day of surgery (outpatient surgery).

When is surgery necessary?

Cataract is a normal change that comes with aging and usually is not damaging to the eye. The patient experiences the same results from surgery no matter when the surgery is undertaken. For this reason, the patient can decide if and when he or she wants to have surgery (elective surgery). This decision is based on how the cataract affects the patient's lifestyle. For most people, the important issues are reading or driving, but the need for surgery may also be based on work or recreational activities.

Rarely, the surgeon will advise his or her patient when to have cataract surgery because of a need to see and/or treat retinal pathology or because of inflammation or glaucoma in the eye.

How successful is the surgery?

If the eye is otherwise normal, the chance for a good result with significant improvement in vision approaches 98 percent and the likelihood of serious complications is low.

How is the surgery performed?

Cataract surgery is usually performed on an outpatient basis under local anesthesia. The procedure takes less than half an hour. There is ordinarily no pain following surgery and the patient can be active as soon as the sedation wears off.

How soon will I see from the operated eye?

If the surgery is done under topical anesthesia, vision may be better immediately after the surgery as the eye is not bandaged. In cases when the eye is bandaged, patients have improved vision as soon as the bandage is removed—usually the day after surgery.

Will I need glasses after cataract surgery?

Usually the patient has quite good vision without glasses but maximum vision may require some glasses. Individual variations in each patient play a role in how well he or she sees after surgery. Each patient should discuss the choices with his or her surgeon. These currently include monofocal, toric, and multifocal or accommodating lens implants, which may be able to correct both distance and near vision and astigmatism.

References

Facts about Cataract www.nei.nih.gov [LINK: http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/cataract/cataract_facts.asp] Accessed 5/28/2013

Cataract www.aoa.org [LINK: <http://www.aoa.org/x4714.xml>] Accessed 5/28/2013

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cited in Colwell v. Bannister, No. 12-15844 and affirmed on September 12, 2014