

“Treat cataracts to see clearly again”

A cataract occurs when the natural lens inside your eye becomes cloudy. The lens is behind the pupil, and serves to focus the light entering the eye onto the retina at the back of your eye for sharp, clear vision. When the lens is cloudy, light is limited and the images can become distorted and inaccurate.

The most common cause of cataracts is just getting older. The proteins in the fluid of the lens start to change and become more opaque instead of clear and transparent. There can be varying degrees of this, from mild cases which are annoying to severe causing almost complete blockage of the light or even blindness.

Age related cataracts do not usually happen acutely (or suddenly), but progress over time. Sometimes, as some of my patients have told me, it happened so gradually that they did not even know how bad it was until they were treated and could actually see well again!

So, if you are getting a bit older, and begin to notice more difficulty appreciating colors, contrast, and sharp details; if it's harder to see to read, drive, and you have trouble recognizing faces until they're much closer; or you start to be bothered more by glare from lights – see your eye care provider for a good exam to make sure you are not developing cataracts.

If you are diabetic, you have an increased chance of cataracts later in life. Smoking will increase your chances of developing this condition by a factor of two to three. And certain drugs, most notably steroids, have been seen to increase the chances of significant cataract formation and progression.

If you are found to have cataracts that are significant enough to treat, eye surgery is usually indicated. Drops may be used in milder cases, and there is still research going on about that, but for now – cataract surgery will restore your vision in the quickest and most complete manner. The surgery is almost always a “same day” surgery, performed under local anesthesia, and the recovery period is short and painless (if you follow your eye surgeon's instructions – please do).

The procedure involves numbing the cornea, making a small incision to get to the lens, using an ultrasonic instrument to liquefy the lens material, and removing that liquid before inserting a new artificial lens in its place. You may wear a patch for a day or two, but from what I hear, you will be amazed at how well you see after the procedure! Usually one eye at a time is done, so then you can look forward to having the other eye done a short time later, if you need that.

We all need a good eye exam at least every two years, and every year if you are diabetic. If found to have significant cataracts, proper treatment will restore sharper vision – and help you maintain better quality of life through this most precious of our senses.

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