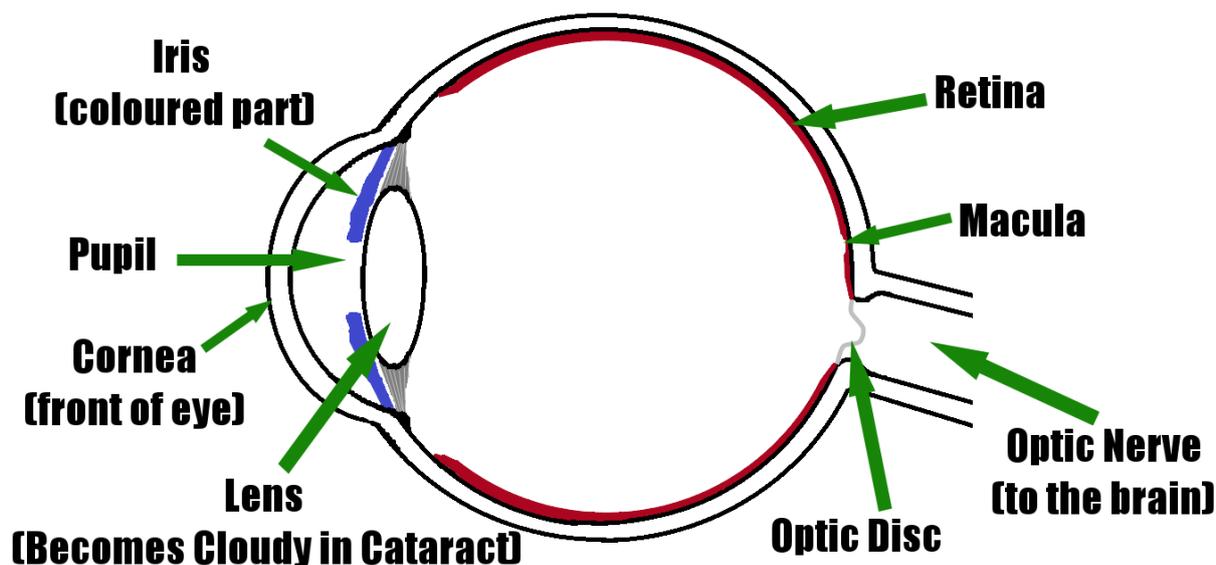


## Information on Cataract and Cataract Surgery



### What is Cataract?

Cataract is a common condition of the eye. It happens when a lens that we have inside our eye becomes cloudy. This cloudiness makes things more difficult to see. It also causes problems with glare, causing light to scatter or spread out inside the eye. It can cause the strength of lenses you need in your spectacles to change more quickly. Sometimes it can also cause double vision.

Another way to think about cataract is to imagine the eye as a camera. If the lens in a camera is cloudy, it doesn't matter if you put another lens in front of the camera, the pictures will still be cloudy. This is why spectacles may no longer give you good vision.

### How can it be treated?

A straightforward operation to remove this cloudy lens and replace it with a plastic one can be performed. Cataract surgery is the most commonly performed operation on the NHS and has a good success rate.

### What causes cataract?

Cataracts can sometimes be present at birth or can develop in children, but easily the most common types are the ones that develop with age. By the age of 65 it is estimated that between a third and a half of people will have some sign of cataract, though they may not yet be bad enough to cause them any difficulty. Usually they progress slowly over a number of years, but sometimes they can develop more quickly, especially if caused by trauma or due to certain medication or medical conditions.

## **I thought cataract was a growth?**

Sometimes people think that a cataract is caused by a skin growing over the eye. This is not actually the case. Also, some people think cataract surgery is done with a laser. It isn't, though there is some development in this area.

## **Is an operation the only way of treating cataract?**

The only way to treat cataract is to have an operation. There are no other effective treatments e.g. medicine, vitamins, diet, eye drops etc. After the operation, your vision is usually much better, unless there are other reasons for your poor sight besides the cataract.

## **Do I need cataract surgery yet?**

If you feel that your vision has become so poor that it seriously affects your everyday life - such as driving, watching TV, or reading - then you should consider having a cataract operation. If you feel that you are unhappy with your vision and you do not want to carry on as you are, then you should seriously consider having cataract surgery.

Unlike in the old days, there is no need to wait until a cataract is very bad. People used to talk about a cataract being "ripe". Because surgery is so much better now, there is no need to struggle on with poor vision.

Whether you decide to have cataract surgery will depend on many things. Just because you have a cataract doesn't mean you should have it removed immediately. Your decision will probably depend on how much the cataract is affecting your daily life. Generally, if you feel you can see quite well, it's probably best not to have surgery yet.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to decide if you can still see well or if you are struggling and need help:

- Do I find it difficult to move around easily and safely, such as when crossing the road, using the stairs or getting on and off public transport?
- Does the glare from sunlight or car headlights bother me a lot?
- Do I find it difficult to do everyday tasks, like cooking, dressing and housework?
- Does my eyesight prevent me from doing my hobbies or sports, or things like watching TV and reading?
- Am I starting to find it difficult to cope with things like recognising people and handling money?
- Can I see well enough to drive?

You can also ask your optometrist what they would do in your situation. And you can ask your family, friends or carers for their advice. Of course, only you can make the final decision.

## **What if I don't have the operation now?**

In most cases, if you do not want to have cataract surgery at this time there shouldn't be any problem with leaving it. A few cases do need action to prevent other problems, now or later on. If

you choose not to have surgery yet, your vision will be likely to get worse until you do decide to have surgery, at which point, assuming nothing else is wrong with your eye, your vision should be as good after surgery as it would have been if you had had the operation earlier.

## **I want to be referred but am not sure I want the operation.**

Nowadays, the hospital only wants to see those people who want to have surgery. If you are still not sure, feel free to arrange to discuss it further with your Optometrist. Only you can decide if your problems are bad enough that you want surgery.

## **What are the risks?**

There are risks with any surgery, and there can be complications with cataract surgery. However, about 95 in every 100 operations have no significant problems. Most complications that do occur after the operation can be dealt with. The risk of a complication that may seriously threaten your sight is about 3 in 1,000.

## **What happens once I am referred?**

You will receive an appointment for a pre-operation assessment where the eye specialist will examine your eyes and discuss your case. The specialist will check there is no other cause for your vision being worse. Some necessary measurements of the eyes will be made. Your general health will be checked. The surgeon will also discuss the risks and benefits of surgery. The surgeon will then make a recommendation to you about whether they think surgery is the best course of action, and there will be an opportunity to discuss together whether to proceed. If the decision is made to proceed, a date will be set for the operation. You will have one eye operated on to begin with (usually the worst). The second eye may be operated on a couple of months after the first if needed.

## **What happens in the operation?**

The operation usually takes between 20 and 40 minutes, and is usually done under a local anaesthetic. This means that you should be able to go home the same day and not need to stay overnight in hospital. You will be awake but will not feel any pain.

The surgeon will make a small cut in the eye and use a probe to break up and suck out the cloudy lens. He will then roll up the replacement plastic lens and, through the same small cut, insert it into the bag that the old lens was in where it opens up. Because the cut is so small, stitches are often not necessary as it seals itself.

## **What happens when I get home?**

Once you go home you should be able to carry on with your usual daily activities once you feel you are able to. Initially you should try to avoid rubbing your eyes, swimming, strenuous exercise, contact sport and heavy lifting as well as eye make-up. Be careful not to get soap or shampoo in the eyes. The hospital will advise you on this. The hospital will also advise you on the drops you need to use after the operation.

## **Is my eye checked again at the Hospital?**

You will normally be followed up at the hospital between 2 and 6 weeks after the operation, depending on circumstances. Your specialist will decide on this.

If everything is successful, at this point your specialist will advise you that you can get a sight test for new spectacles and/or you may be listed to have the second eye cataract operated on.

## **Will I need glasses after the operation?**

Once the specialist has said it's ok to have your eyes tested you should make an appointment with your optometrist. This is usually about 4 to 6 weeks after the operation, unless there are special circumstances. Your optometrist will check you and find out if you need glasses. It is possible you may not need spectacles for some things you used to use them for. Some people find that they no longer need spectacles for distance, and only need them for reading. Some people continue to need spectacles for both distance and/or reading. You will probably need to wear glasses for some tasks, possibly with a different type of lens. Your optometrist will recommend what they consider are the best options for you.

## **Can a cataract grow back again?**

No. A cataract is caused by the lens in your eye becoming cloudy, and since that lens has now been removed it cannot come back. The most common complication after surgery is where the bag that the new lens sits in becomes thicker. This causes vision to become cloudy, and some people become concerned that the cataract has returned. This can happen even several years after the operation. This can easily be treated with a minor procedure using a laser. If you need this, your optometrist can identify it at a sight test and refer you.

## **I have further questions that are not answered here**

You should feel free to contact your optometrist if you wish to discuss cataract and cataract surgery further. You can also find further information here:

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)      search for *cataract*

[www.eyecarewm.co.uk/patient-information/](http://www.eyecarewm.co.uk/patient-information/)