

CATARACTS

What are they and how treated?

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A cataract is a clouding of the crystalline lens inside the eye behind the iris (the colored part of your eye). People can get cataracts at any age but the older we are, the higher the risk. Cataracts do not damage the eye, they only make your vision hazy, blurry or distorted until they are removed. As light passes through the now cloudy part of the lens, it is distorted causing an out of focus or blurry image on the back of the eye. There are different types of cataracts and some are more bothersome than others. If a cataract is in the periphery of the lens it may not affect your vision, but central cataracts cause glare and distortion. Cataracts do not cause pain, irritation or discomfort; they only affect your vision. Studies have shown that **cataracts can be prevented or their growth greatly stunted** by regularly getting proper nutrition, such as eating a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables every day, especially dark green leafy vegetables. If you can't eat that many fresh fruits and vegetables daily, then supplements are very helpful. **Juice Plus+** is a *Whole Food Nutritional Supplement* which has been called "the next best thing to eating fresh fruits and vegetables. Also *Eye Vitamin Supplements* with the AREDS 2 Formula are good.

When cataracts interfere with vision, to see clearly again, the entire crystalline lens must be removed. Several years ago, doctors had to make a large incision through the sclera (the white of the eye) and remove the lens in one piece. But now they are able to make two small incisions in the edge of the cornea (the clear dome over the iris – the colored part of the eye) at the limbus (where the cornea and sclera meet or where the white and color part of the eye meet). There is a capsule which goes all around the lens (like an enclosed pillow case on a pillow). The lens is held in place by fine fibers called zonules which attach the lens capsule to the internal eye muscles. To remove the cataract without disturbing these zonules, a capsulotomy is performed. This is done by first dilating the pupil, making as large an opening in the pupil as possible to expose the front surface of the lens capsule. Then the doctor will peel off a circular section from the front capsule (a capsulotomy) to be able to get to the lens. The lens with the cataract is then removed piece by piece with a suction device leaving the capsule intact.

Next an artificial lens (called an IOL or Intra Ocular Lens) is inserted into the remaining capsule. Once correctly positioned, this IOL restores your vision without the need for very thick glasses. IOL's have only been around for about 30 years. So before IOL's were implanted during surgery, people's vision was very blurry unless they wore very thick glasses or contacts to restore the focusing of the eye. Now the IOL restores the focusing. You may still need glasses after your eyes heal but usually the glasses are low power and pretty thin.

The last thing the surgeon does before he is finished with the surgery is put a fluid in the eye to restore the shape of the cornea and make sure the wound seals off and does not leak. Occasionally he will use one or two sutures across the incision site or use a bandage contact lens to make sure the eye does not leak. This fluid is a little thicker than your natural fluid so it may cause your eye pressure to be slightly high for a few hours (sometimes causing some soreness) but the eye pressure is usually back to normal by the next day or two. You will be checked for an incision leak and high eye pressure either late the same day of surgery or the next day by the surgeon's staff or by your referring doctor at his office. You will normally be seen for Cataract Post-Op visits at one day (or same day), then at 1 week and at 5 – 6 weeks. By 5 weeks the eye has usually healed well enough to check you for a glasses prescription. Until then you may be able to wear drugstore readers to help you read at near. Typically you will need to take two different eye drops for 3 days before eye surgery and for 1 week after, and one other drop for 4 – 6 weeks after eye surgery. Most people can drive and return to most normal activities and work a few days after surgery. Instructions will be given after your surgery.