



## HEALTH INFORMATION

# Cataracts

## What is a cataract?

When light enters the eye through the pupil, the image of the outside world is focused on to back of the eye (the retina) so that a clear picture is sent to the brain. Most of the focusing is done by the front of the eye (the cornea) but the 'fine tuning' is done by a lens inside the middle of the eyeball. The lens is a disc of tightly packed transparent cells surrounded by an elastic capsule. Muscles inside the eyeball change the shape of the lens changing its focusing power. Sometimes the lens becomes cloudy and this is then called a cataract.

## How do cataracts occur?

In the UK the commonest cause of cataracts is old age, as over time, pigment is deposited in the lens and its structure degenerates. However, there are some conditions where cataracts can form earlier, for instance: congenital rubella, diabetes, smoking and steroid use. Traumatic eye injuries sometimes cause cataracts to form and it is thought some forms of radiation may lead to cataracts.

## What are the symptoms?

In the early stages a cataract may not cause any symptoms and is frequently only noted when the person goes for an eye test when it is seen by the optician. As the cataract gets worse it causes vision to be impaired in the affected eye causing a mistiness or sometimes the impression of dark blobs in the eye. These visual problems cannot be rectified by spectacles and therefore an optician will advise the person to go to the doctors. Cataracts do not cause eye pain or redness so if these occur especially with worsening vision, seek medical advice immediately.

If the cataract is not treated it may get worse to the point where the eye becomes blind.

## What is the treatment?

The only way to treat a cataract is to surgically remove it.

Your GP will help to advise you when to be referred to a specialist for the operation since surgery is only necessary if the cataract is causing visual difficulties. Techniques used in cataract surgery have improved over recent years. It may be done as a day case and occasionally an overnight stay.

- Light-headedness, dizziness
- Paleness
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating

## What is the outcome?

Generally speaking cataract surgery is very successful, resulting in a huge improvement in vision in almost all cases. However, as with any operation there are occasional complications. Sometimes the eye can become sore, blurred and sticky indicating an infection requiring urgent treatment and in some cases the tiny stitches may need to be removed either because they are uncomfortable or they may cause distortion of vision making prescribing of suitable glasses difficult.

## Where can I get further information?

The following are support groups for those who are experiencing some loss of vision, including cataracts.

**National Association of Local Societies for Visual Impaired**  
PO Box 823, Doncaster, South Yorkshire, DN1 9AQ  
Telephone: 01777-705299 (Mon, Wed, Thur).

Handles queries from the general public in connection with visual equipment and puts them in touch with their local blind society.

**Royal National Institute for the Blind**  
105 Judd Street, London, WC1H 9NE  
Telephone: 0207-388 1266  
Helpline: 0303-123 9999  
Website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

[www.medigold-health.com](http://www.medigold-health.com)

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