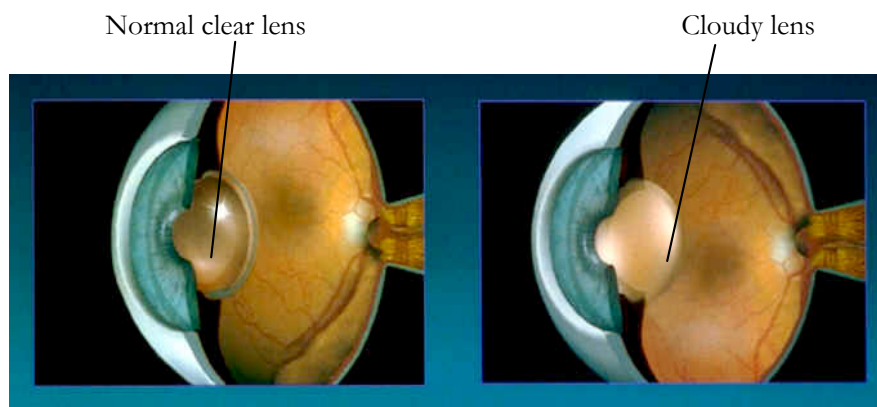

WHAT IS A CATARACT?

A CATARACT IS A CLOUDING OF THE NORMALLY CLEAR LENS OF THE EYE.



The lens focuses light rays on the retina at the back of the eye to produce a sharp image of what we see. When the lens becomes cloudy, the light rays cannot pass properly through it, and the image becomes blurry.

Cataracts are a normal part of the aging process. The older you are, the more likely you are to have them. About half of Americans ages 65-74 have cataracts. Most people with cataracts have a cataract in both eyes. However, one eye may be worse than the other because each can develop at a different rate. Cataracts can also come from eye injuries, certain diseases, or medications. There can be a family tendency towards cataracts at an earlier age.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A CATARACT?

Here are some symptoms of a cataract:

- Cloudy, fuzzy, foggy, or filmy vision.
- Changes in the way you see colors.
- Problems driving at night because headlights seem too bright.
- Problems with glare from lights or the sun.
- Frequent changes in your eyeglass prescription.
- Double vision.
- Better near vision for a while only in farsighted people.

These symptoms also can be signs of other eye problems. Only a thorough eye exam can tell you if your symptoms are from cataract.

HOW IS A CATARACT DIAGNOSED?

A complete eye exam is all that is needed to determine whether or not you have a cataract. This will include vision testing, and dilating your pupils. The doctor will use a bright light to see whether your

lenses are clear and to check for other eye problems. The doctor may also perform **brightness acuity testing (BAT)**, a way of measuring how much glare affects your vision. Occasionally other tests may be used, such as potential vision testing pachymetry or specular microscopy.

HOW CAN A CATARACT BE TREATED?

There are no medications, eye drops, exercises or glasses that will cause cataracts to disappear once they have formed. Surgery is the only way to remove a cataract. The cataract may need no treatment at all if the vision is only a little blurry. A change in your eyeglass prescription may improve vision for a while. Stronger bifocals or the use of a magnifying lens may be enough for reading. When you are not able to see well enough to do the things you like to do - reading, driving, watching TV, sewing, etc - even with the proper prescription, cataract surgery should be considered. There is no such thing as “waiting until it becomes ripe”.

In cataract surgery the cloudy lens is removed from the eye. In most cases, the focusing power of the natural lens is restored by replacing it with a permanent intraocular lens implant.

HOW DO I DECIDE WHETHER TO HAVE SURGERY?


Most people have plenty of time to decide about cataract surgery. Your doctor cannot make your decision for you, but talking with your doctor can help you decide.

Tell your doctor how your cataract affects your vision and your life. Circle the statements below that apply to you and share this list with your doctor:

You may also have other specific problems that you want to discuss with your eye doctor.

- I need to drive, but there is too much glare from the sun or headlights.
- I do not see well enough to do my best at work.
- I do not see well enough to do the things I need to do at home.
- I do not see well enough to do things I like to do (for example, read, watch TV, sew, hike, play cards, go out with friends).
- I am afraid I will bump into something or fall.
- Because of my cataract, I am not as independent as I would like to be.
- My glasses do not help me see well enough.
- My eyesight bothers me a lot.

Most people who have a cataract recover from surgery with no problems and improved vision. In fact, serious complications are not common with modern cataract surgery. This type of surgery has a success rate of 98 percent in patients with otherwise healthy eyes. But no surgery is risk free. There is about a 1% chance of decreased vision. Although serious complications are not common, when they occur they could result in loss of vision.



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