Cataracts

An Excerpt from X-Plain™ The Patient Education Institute, Inc.

The eye’s lens is made up of water and molecules. As we age, sometimes the molecules clump together. This can start to cloud areas of the lens, blocking some light from reaching the retina, and reducing vision. Clouded areas on the lens of the eye can cause cataracts. Cataracts are mostly associated with aging. However, they can also occur after birth or after an eye injury.

Cataract Symptoms
In their earliest stages, cataracts may not be noticeable. As the eye lens becomes more clouded, vision is blurred and reduced. Signs of cataracts include having blurry vision or poor night vision. Symptoms of cataracts also include seeing halos around lights, faded colors or double vision.

Diagnosis and Treatment Options
Your doctor will take a detailed medical history and do a thorough eye examination in order to determine the cause of the blurred vision. If the doctor determines you have cataracts, the treatment will depend on how blurred your vision is and the degree to which it affects your lifestyle.

In mild cases of cataracts, eyeglasses may help temporarily. As time goes by, the lens of the eye can become so cloudy that it blocks light from reaching the retina. This can reduce vision to the extent that sharp images can no longer be formed. In cases such as this, cataract surgery is recommended.

Cataract Surgery
Cataract surgery is a very safe and successful operation. The operation usually lasts less than one hour and is almost painless.

For people who have cataracts in both eyes, the doctor will not replace the lenses at the same time. The second eye will be done after the first has healed.

After the Operation
Following the doctor’s instructions is essential for a good and speedy recovery. It may take six weeks before the eye is healed. The length of the healing period depends on the patient’s age and medical condition.


Did U Know?
Here are some myths and facts about cataracts from Prevent Blindness America:

- **Myth:** Only older Americans develop cataracts.
- **Fact:** While cataracts affect nearly 20.5 million Americans age 40 and older, the condition can occur among young adults or children.

- **Myth:** The best time to have cataract surgery done is when it’s first diagnosed.
- **Fact:** Cataract removal is elective surgery, which means it is the patient’s choice when to undergo the procedure. Most people need surgery when the cataract causes enough vision loss to interfere with work, play or other day-to-day tasks. You, your eye doctor and family members should decide when and if surgery is needed.

- **Myth:** Taking aspirin can prevent cataracts.
- **Fact:** There are not enough facts or evidence to say whether aspirin prevents cataracts.

- **Myth:** Cataract surgery is dangerous.
- **Fact:** Cataract surgery is a delicate operation but one of the safest operations done today. More than 95% of surgeries are successful.

- **Myth:** It can take months to recover from cataract surgery.
- **Fact:** In many cases, patients often can see well enough to resume normal activities after a few days, and vision will continue to improve over the following weeks and months.

Three Ways to Protect Your Sight
Eye expert Dr. Emily Chew of the National Eye Institute’s Division of Epidemiology and Clinical Research says “Early detection and treatment are the keys to preventing vision loss. Remember, poor vision is not a normal part of aging.” Here are Dr. Chew’s tips for keeping eyes healthy:

1. Get regular eye exams. Early detection and treatment are the keys to preventing vision loss. In fact, the eyes often show signs of other conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, when no other symptoms are present. An eye care professional may be the first to identify one of these problems. If you are at higher risk for an eye disease, it is important to make sure you get an eye exam through dilated pupils. This allows your eye care provider to see more of the inside of your eyes to check for early signs of the disease.

2. Eat a healthy diet. Your mother may have told you to eat green, leafy vegetables, and she was right. These veggies are high in vitamin A, a key ingredient to good sight.

3. Protect your eyes at all ages. Most injuries are sports-related. Outfit your child with goggles or helmet shields for sports. Protect your own eyes when working with lawn mowers and other tools. Be sure to wear sunglasses to limit the impact of ultraviolet rays from the sun on your eyes.

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