

# Cataracts



THE COLLEGE  
OF OPTOMETRISTS

# Overview

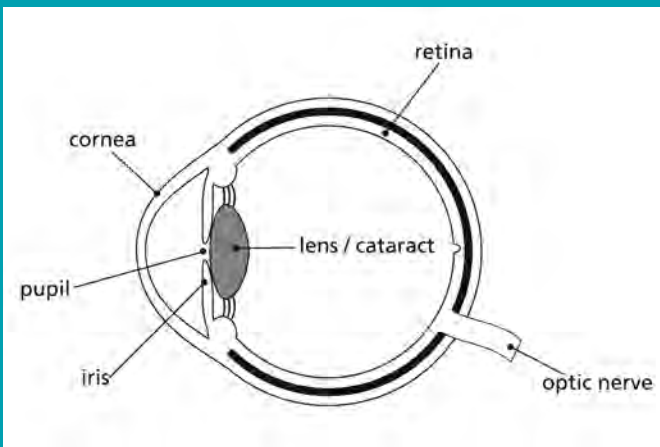
We have developed this leaflet to help you understand more about cataracts.

You get a cataract when the clear lens inside your eye becomes cloudy or misty. This is a gradual process that usually happens as we get older. It does not hurt.

The early stages of a cataract do not necessarily affect your sight.

The only proven treatment for a cataract is surgery. If the cataract gets to the stage where it affects your sight, your optometrist will refer you to hospital to have this done. The surgery is carried out under a local anaesthetic and is very safe. Once you have had the cataract removed, it will not return.

If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are the eye-health specialists on the high street. An eye examination is a vital health check and should be part of everyone's normal health care.



### **Why do cataracts occur?**

The main cause is age. However, smoking and exposure to sunlight have been linked to getting cataracts.

Younger people can develop cataracts if they have an injury to the eye. Some medical conditions including diabetes or taking some sorts of medication may also cause cataracts. A very small number of babies are born with a cataract.

### **Will cataracts affect my vision?**

Many people with a cataract notice that they need the prescription for their glasses changing. If you are long-sighted, you may even notice that you need your glasses less than you did before you had the cataract! You may notice that your vision is less clear and distinct.

Car headlights and streetlights can become dazzling. You may experience difficulties moving from shade to sunlit areas. Colours may look different too and become faded or yellowed.

If you experience any of these symptoms, make an appointment to see your optometrist.

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### **Can I prevent cataracts?**

There are various supplements on the market which claim to help slow the progression of cataracts and some eye drops have been marketed as a treatment for them. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that any of these can prevent or treat cataracts. The best advice to try to prevent cataracts, or to stop them getting worse, is not to smoke, and to wear good-quality sunglasses with full UV protection.

### **Treating cataracts**

If your cataract is affecting your day-to-day life (for example, driving, reading or cooking), and your optometrist cannot improve this enough by changing your glasses, you can ask them to refer you to an ophthalmologist (specialist eye doctor) for surgery. This involves removing the cloudy lens (the cataract) and replacing it with a clear plastic one.

### **What does cataract surgery involve?**

You will have an initial appointment where the ophthalmologist will assess and measure your eyes. You will be asked about your general health to help make sure that the operation is suitable for you. The ophthalmologist may also be able to correct short- or long-sightedness so that you may not need to wear your glasses as much after the operation as you did before.

*To try to prevent cataracts, or to stop them getting worse, don't smoke and wear good quality sunglasses with full UV protection*

Most cataract operations are done using a local anaesthetic. You will be awake, but the anaesthetist will make sure you do not feel the area around your eye. You will hear the eye specialist explaining what they are doing, and may see some vague movements around the eye. The specialist makes a tiny cut in the eye to remove the cataract, and will, in most cases, insert a plastic replacement lens so that you can see clearly. This will usually take around 15 to 20 minutes, although it can take longer.

You will not normally need stitches, but your eye will be covered to protect it from knocks for a few days after the operation. You will be allowed to go home the same day, but should have someone to go with you. Do not drive.

### **After the operation**

The ophthalmologist will give you eye drops to use for the first few weeks after your operation. Avoid heavy lifting and strenuous exercise immediately after the operation, but carry on with most other activities round the home as normal. Avoid eye make-up and try not to get soapy water in your eyes when you wash your hair. If you go out on a windy day, you may feel safer with sunglasses to prevent grit getting in your eye. Ask your specialist about when you can go back to work.

If you have any concerns, give the eye clinic a call for advice.

## Will I need new spectacles after my cataract operation?

Your eyesight will settle down in a few days or weeks. You will probably find that your glasses will need changing after the operation, so you will need to see your optometrist again for an eye examination a few weeks after the surgery. Your ophthalmologist or optometrist will be able to advise you as to when you can start driving again.

You may find that it takes a few weeks to adapt to your vision with new glasses after cataract surgery. This is normal, and is due to your brain adapting to a different prescription.

*Your eyesight will normally settle down a few days or weeks after a cataract operation*

## A cataract can make car headlights dazzling.



Normal



With cataract

### Will the cataract come back?

After some months or years, a few people notice that their vision becomes cloudy or misty again in the eye where the cataract has been removed. This is not the cataract returning, but is due to the sac which contains the replacement lens clouding up. This cloudiness can be removed by painless laser treatment in a matter of minutes. Contact your optometrist if you are worried that this is happening to you.

### Do cataracts only occur in one eye?

If you have had a cataract removed from one eye, it is likely that you will need the same treatment for the other eye at some point in the future.

### **For more information please talk to your optometrist.**

This leaflet is produced by The College of Optometrists. We are the professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the UK. People who are our members agree to meet the highest clinical and ethical standards. Look for the letters MCOptom or FCOptom to see if your optometrist is a member.

Please visit **[www.lookafteryoureyes.org](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org)** for more information.

This information should not replace advice that your optometrist or relevant health professional would give you.

Your local optometrist:

If you would like this leaflet in large print, please email  
[patients@college-optometrists.org](mailto:patients@college-optometrists.org)

**The College of Optometrists**

42 Craven Street  
London, WC2N 5NG  
Tel: 020 7839 6000

Email: [optometry@college-optometrists.org](mailto:optometry@college-optometrists.org)  
[www.college-optometrists.org](http://www.college-optometrists.org)  
[www.lookafteryoureyes.org](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org)

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