

# Seeing again with cataract surgery

BY AMJAD KHOKHAR, MD

Cataract surgery is the number one cause of vision loss and blindness in the United States and the world. Fortunately, this loss of vision is completely reversible. Millions of people every year recover their vision through modern cataract surgery.

A cataract is a clouding of the natural lens of our eye that often occurs with aging. The natural lens that we are born with allows light to pass through our eye and focuses it on the retina, where images are sent to the brain. With clouding of the lens, or cataract formation, focused light is not able to reach the retina. As a result, images are blurred.

There are several different types of cataracts. Most cataracts are a result of aging. However, you don't have to be "old" to get cataracts. Sometimes younger individuals might get cataracts early from trauma, diabetes, steroid-containing medications, smoking, or other reasons. Sometimes, even babies are born with a special type of cataract called a congenital cataract. Adults with cataracts usually notice that their vision is blurred even with their best glasses. Sometimes, people no-



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or even recognizing people's faces. When severe, cataracts can even prevent some people from being able to take care of themselves. Glasses usually cannot help the vision loss that comes from having cataracts.

## Common symptoms

The most common symptoms of cataracts are:

- Blurry or cloudy vision
- Colors seem faded
- Glare and haloes around lights, like headlights or sunlight
- Difficult seeing at night
- Frequent changes in eye-glass prescriptions

In the olden days, ophthalmologists had to wait for cataracts to "ripen" or become hard and white. These days, that is

tice glare around lights, such as headlights at night. This can interfere with activities such as driving, reading, watching TV, playing sports,

not necessary or desirable. As soon as a person's activities start to become affected by the cataract, cataract surgery can be safely performed. In fact, waiting too long can often make the surgery more complex and can lengthen recovery.

Only an ophthalmologist can perform cataract surgery. An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor (MD), who spends four years after medical school specializing in treating eye diseases and performing eye surgeries.

If your eye care is provided by a Doctor of Optometry (DO), he or she will need to send you to an ophthalmologist for your surgery. The surgery is done as an outpatient, so that means you do not have to stay in a hospital. Usually, a patient will arrive about 1 hour before the surgery. Medicine is applied to make sure that the patient does not feel any pain.

Ultrasound is used to break up the cataract into small pieces, which are then vacuumed out of the eye. A new artificial lens is placed where the cataract used to be. This allows the light coming into your eye to be focused properly. In the vast majority of cases, no stitches are needed with modern cata-

ract surgery.

## Post surgery

After cataract surgery, you may have to wear an eye patch for one day. In many cases, patients are seeing better the next day, but it can take about 3 to 4 weeks for the vision to become its sharpest.

Glasses must be prescribed again after cataract surgery. Sometimes, glasses might be needed for only up close work. Some of the newest lens that can be implanted in the eye can leave people independent from glasses for both far away and up close.

That's right, cataract surgery with some of the newest lens implants can get some individuals out of glasses completely.

Of course, eye surgery certainly makes people nervous. It is comforting to know that less than 1 percent of those undergoing modern cataract surgeries suffer some degree of vision loss. This makes cataract surgery one of the most successful surgeries in modern medicine allowing millions of people to see better every year.

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