

What Every Patient Should Know About Cataracts

A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding Cataracts, Causes and Treatment

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Introduction to This Guide

If you have a cataract in one or both eyes, you may have some questions about the impact on your quality of life. Advanced cataracts can prevent you from doing everyday activities such as reading and driving. Left untreated, they may even lead to blindness.

Fortunately, vision loss caused by cataracts can be successfully restored through surgery in almost every case. Cataract surgery has undergone tremendous technological advances in recent years.

Today, it is safer and more precise than ever before. No longer does the procedure simply restore your distance vision. Today, the goal is to provide you with a full range of vision while minimizing your dependence on glasses.

This guide tells you all you need to know about this common medical condition, and—hopefully—offers you the reassurance that your cataracts can be treated.

Cataracts and Their Causes

What is a cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of our eye's natural lens. That lens helps us to focus on objects, whether they're close to us or far away. It works in a similar way to the zoom lens of a camera. Like any lens, it must be clear to work well. If it clouds up, it can't focus properly.

What causes our lens to cloud up?

The lens of the eye is made up of mostly water and protein. Unfortunately, some of that protein tends to clump together as we age. When this happens, less light reaches the retina at the back of the eye, making the image that the retina records less sharp.

Who gets cataracts?

Most (but not all) cataracts are related to aging, so they're far more common in older people. According to the National Eye Institute, the risk of getting cataracts increases every ten years from around the age of 40. More than half of all Americans have cataracts by the time they're 80.

Did you know: Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness worldwide, and the main cause of vision loss in the United States.

How Do Eye Specialists Check for Cataracts?

To diagnose a cataract, your eye specialist will perform a thorough eye examination. This includes a vision test, a slit-lamp examination, and a retinal exam. Altogether, the completely painless and non-invasive examination takes about an hour to complete.

Be prepared to have drops put in your eyes for the retinal exam. These drops dilate your pupils (make them wider) so that your eye specialists can see the entire retina. The effects of the drops wear off after about four to six hours.



What are the symptoms of a cataract?

In the early stages of a cataract, you may not actually notice any loss of vision. This is because a cataract affects just a small part of your lens to begin with. As it grows larger, however, your vision becomes more blurred, and you'll have trouble seeing without the help of a bright light. It's like looking through a dirty window—everything is blurred.

Other signs of cataracts include:

- A strong reaction to light and glare
- A halo effect around lights
- Poor night vision
- Difficulty distinguishing between certain colors (e.g. navy blue, brown, and black)
- Double vision or several images in one eye

Are there different types of cataracts?

There are many different types of cataracts, but the 3 most common are those that relate to aging:

- Nuclear Sclerotic Cataracts form in the center of the lens (the nucleus), making it hard to see small details and creating halos around bright objects.
- Cortical Cataracts create white wedges along the edge of the lens (the cortex). Because these wedges scatter light coming into the lens, the main symptom is glare. They also make it hard to judge how near or far an object is (depth perception).
- Posterior Subcapsular Cataracts form just inside the back of the lens capsule, directly in the path of light as it passes through the eye. This damages your close-up vision and makes it harder to see in bright lighting.

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Treating Cataracts

What happens if cataracts are left untreated?

Just because cataracts are common, don't make the mistake of thinking they're not serious. If left untreated, cataracts can cause total blindness. All cataracts must be treated sooner or later.

Most cataracts worsen gradually over time, giving you plenty of time to prepare a care plan

and consider all your options. Some cataracts deteriorate quickly, though, and it's impossible to predict the rate of deterioration accurately.

The factors that affect a cataract's progression are varied. They include the type of cataract you have and your age, overall eye health, and general health. That's why it is so important to have regular eye exams, especially if you're over 40.

Cataracts affect 1 in 6 Americans over the age of 40.



Can you prevent cataracts from forming?

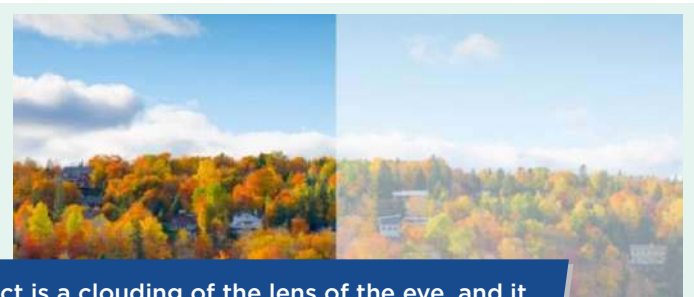
Unfortunately, there's no way to fully prevent cataracts from forming. However, there are a few things you can do to limit your risk of getting cataracts, such as:

- Wearing sunglasses outside to avoid prolonged exposure to ultraviolet light (especially between 10 am and 3 pm, when the sun is at its most intense)
- Looking after your general health, and not smoking (some health problems like diabetes can create secondary health problems like cataracts)
- Taking regular exercise and eating a diet rich in colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains and fish
- Having regular checkups with your eye specialists, especially as you get older

Can you cure cataracts without surgery?

The short answer is no. Eyeglasses may improve your sight in the early stages, but not in all cases. Surgery is the only method of removing a cataract. Generally, the earlier that cataract surgery is done, the better the outcome. Untreated cataracts can be harder to remove, increasing the likelihood of complications.

Your eye specialists can help you decide when it's time to have surgery. Usually, it's when your cataracts are stopping you from doing everyday activities or enjoying life



A cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye, and it develops when proteins in the lens clump together.

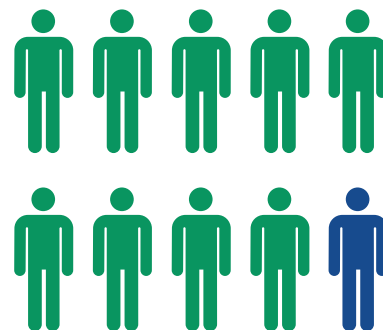
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Cataracts Surgery

What is the process of cataract surgery?

- **Step One:** After making a small incision, ultrasound is used to break up and remove the cloudy cataract.
- **Step Two:** The flexible intraocular lens (IOL) is folded up and inserted into the lens capsule, at which point it opens and its haptics, or “arms,” unfold to keep it in the proper position.
- **Step Three:** With the cataract removed, and the IOL in place, light can once again travel unimpeded to the back of your eye, for clearer, more youthful vision.

Nine out of 10 patients who have cataract surgery **regain 20/20 to 20/40 vision.**



What are the different types of cataract surgery?

Cataract surgery is one of the safest surgeries available and typically takes between ten and fifteen minutes to complete. You don't even have to stay in hospital overnight because cataract surgery is normally done on an outpatient basis.

At Florida Eye Specialists, we offer three types of cataract surgery for you to choose from. These include:

Traditional

With our Traditional Cataract Surgery, a small incision is made in the front part of the eye (the cornea) so the surgeon can use ultrasound to break up the cataract into small sections, which are then removed. Patients then receive a standard intraocular lens (IOL). Patients will likely need glasses 100% of the time for near and intermediate activities and may need glasses for distance as well, depending on the amount of uncorrected astigmatism.

Precise

Our Precise option includes our Laser Cataract Surgery. This uses a sophisticated imaging system to measure the exact thickness of the cataract and its exact depth within the eye and is a highly accurate and precise method. This also allows you to regain quality distance vision while also correcting low astigmatism. Choose from a standard lens with low astigmatism correction or a customized toric lens for high levels of astigmatism correction.

Premium

For patients wanting to greatly reduce their dependency upon glasses, we are proud to offer our Premium option. This option includes Laser Cataract Surgery with astigmatism correction with a Presbyopia-correcting Lens. The Presbyopia-correcting Lens is designed to provide you with a wider range of vision: near, intermediate and distance.

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Are there any risks to cataract surgery?

Cataract surgery is generally considered safe. However, as with any operation, there are risks attached. In the case of cataract surgery, the main risks are infection and bleeding. Fortunately, complications after cataract surgery are rare, and most can be treated successfully. Always weigh the pros and cons of cataract surgery with your eye specialist, who will take your unique circumstances into consideration.

How long does it take to recover from cataract surgery?

Full recovery from cataract surgery is pretty quick (around eight weeks), but you will begin to see the results in your vision in the first few days. During the operation, you'll be given a local anesthetic to numb the area around your eye. The sedation will make you feel a bit groggy afterwards, so you'll need someone to drive you home.

There'll be some discomfort for the first few days, and you may need to wear an eye patch or protective shield on the day of surgery. Your eye specialist may also suggest wearing a protective shield at night to stop you rubbing your eye in your sleep.

Expect some blurry vision in the beginning. After all, your eye has just been operated on, and it will need some time to heal and adjust. However, your vision should improve within just a few days. If you need cataract surgery in both eyes, you will undergo two separate operations. Our surgeons like the first eye to recover before they operate on the second.

What's Your Next Step?

If you've been diagnosed with a cataract, you'll be facing some pretty important decisions about your treatment options. Our best advice is to speak with a dedicated cataract consultant who will explain everything in detail to you and help you select the best solution.

Cataract consultants are trained to listen and care because they know that no two people are alike. They also understand that this can be a stressful time. Our cataract consultants explain all the procedures and answer all your questions so you can choose the best course of treatment with your doctor. More importantly, they won't rush you into making a decision but make sure you are informed and educated to make the best decision for you.

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About Florida Eye Specialists

Florida Eye Specialists is a leading eye care center in Florida, offering patients the very best in experience, safety, and accuracy. Our surgeons have performed more than 50,000 cataract procedures and have a combined thirty years of practice at the Mayo Clinic and University of Florida.

We were also the first practice in Northeast Florida to introduce laser cataract surgery, offering the most advanced technology available at our state-of-the-art surgery center. In the time we have been performing laser-assisted cataract surgery, we have completed more than 6,500 cases at our surgery center.



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