
Cataracts

Summary

- Cataracts are a common cause of low vision in the elderly.
 - Cataract surgery is safe and effective.
 - Sun protection and quitting smoking may help to prevent or delay cataracts.
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A cataract is a clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye. Cataracts are treated by removing the cloudy lens of the eye with surgery. Sun protection and quitting smoking may help prevent cataracts. Cataracts are common in older people.

Due to its association with ageing, eventually everyone will develop a cataract if they live long enough. By the age of 80, almost all of us will have some degree of cataract formation.

Symptoms of cataracts

Symptoms of a cataract can include:

- blurred vision
- sensitivity to light (glare)
- reduced night vision
- fading or 'yellowing' of colours.

Diagnosis of cataracts

Cataracts can be diagnosed with an eye examination. If you notice any changes in your vision, you should have your vision checked by a doctor, optometrist or eye specialist.

Causes of cataracts

Most cataracts develop as part of the ageing process. Long term and unprotected exposure to UV sunlight, smoking, diabetes and a family history are among increased risk factors for developing cataract.

Treatment for cataracts

Your ophthalmologist will advise if your cataract should be removed. A cataract may only be removed by surgery, usually performed under a local anaesthetic. More than 180,000 cataract operations are performed every year.

A small incision is made and the cataract-affected lens is removed. It is replaced with a small plastic intraocular lens. Surgery usually requires no stitches and visual recovery typically occurs within days. Once a cataract is removed, it cannot redevelop.

Prevention of cataracts

Wearing sunglasses to protect from prolonged direct exposure to UV sunlight, and not smoking, may assist to prevent the early development of cataract.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Optometrist
- Ophthalmologist (eye specialist)

Things to remember

- Cataracts are a common cause of low vision in the elderly.
- Cataract surgery is safe and effective.
- Sun protection and quitting smoking may help to prevent or delay cataracts.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Centre for Eye Research Australia

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