

What is a cataract?



A cataract is the clouding of the eye's normally clear lens which occurs naturally with age.

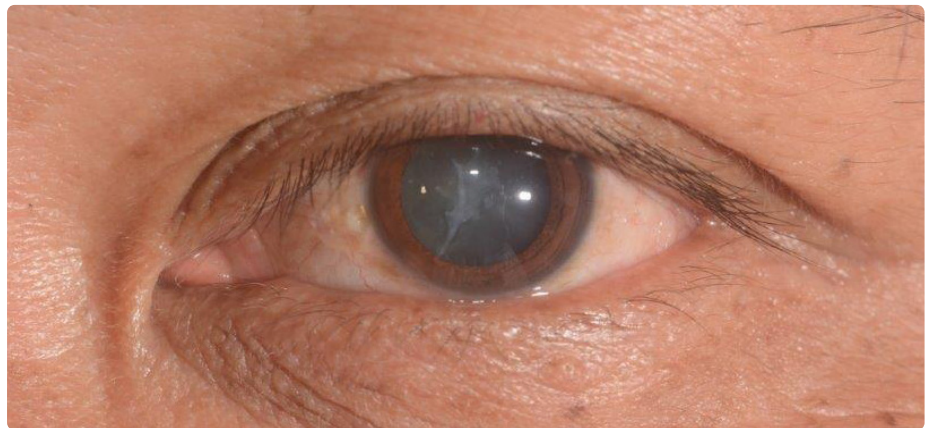
Over time, the cloudiness progressively blocks light rays from passing easily through the lens to the retina, **resulting in blurred, faint or hazy vision, or in seeing colours as faded or yellowed.** Cataracts can occur in one or both eyes.

What causes a cataract?

A cataract is a common eye condition most often associated with ageing, but it can uncommonly occur in infants and children.

Factors that increase the chance of developing a cataract include:

- Age 60 years and above
- Hereditary and genetic factors
- Eye trauma
- Previous eye surgery
- Previous eye inflammation and infection
- Diabetes
- Prolonged use of some medications such as steroids
- Prolonged exposure to ultraviolet radiation from sunlight and other sources
- Smoking.



What are the symptoms of a cataract?

Cataracts are not painful and in the early stages may not cause noticeable changes in your sight. Loss of vision is usually gradual.

But as the condition advances, symptoms can include:

- Blurred, cloudy or dim vision
- Colours appearing to be faded or yellowed
- Difficulty with night vision or in situations of low light
- Sensitivity to glare and bright light
- Double vision in the affected eye
- Appearance of a 'halo' around lights
- Frequent changes in glasses prescriptions as the focusing power of the eye is altered.

How is a cataract diagnosed?

A **comprehensive eye examination** by your ophthalmologist will determine if a cataract is present. A comprehensive eye examination will also determine if there are other causes of vision loss, particularly problems involving the retina or optic nerve.



How is a cataract treated?

Cataract surgery is one of the most frequently performed surgical procedures in the world.

Most people who have cataract surgery experience a **positive improvement in vision** without experiencing any complications.

When considering surgery, you should ensure you understand the benefits and risk involved. These will be fully discussed with you by your ophthalmologist.

Surgery is the only effective way to remove a cataract. There are currently no other known non-surgical treatments, medications or dietary supplements that will prevent or cure a cataract.

When should I have cataract surgery?

In the early stages of cataract development, your symptoms may be improved simply with different prescription glasses or brighter lighting.

In most cases, the time to consider surgery is when a cataract causes enough vision loss to **affect your quality of life or interferes with your daily activities**, such as work, driving, reading, or watching television.

The decision of timing is one we recommend you make with your ophthalmologist.

What does cataract surgery involve?

Surgery is usually performed as a day procedure under a local anaesthetic.

The most common surgical technique involves three steps:

- A **small incision** is made into the edge of the cornea
- Tiny instruments are used to **break apart and remove cataract**
- An **intraocular lens (IOL) is implanted**. The incision heals naturally without the need for sutures.

An intraocular lens (or IOL) is an artificial lens that replaces the eye's natural lens which is removed during cataract surgery. Measurements (biometry) of your eye are taken pre-operatively, so that your ophthalmologist can choose the appropriate IOL for your eye.

There are different types of IOLs available including monofocal, extended depth of focus, and multifocal lenses. The type of IOL that will work best for you depends on your eye condition(s) and lifestyle needs, and you will discuss this with your ophthalmologist at the pre-operative clinic visit.

What happens after surgery?

You will be able to see out of the operated eye the day after surgery, but the vision may be a bit blurry and glary.

Your vision will improve on a daily basis for several days and your focus will stabilise over several weeks.

Some activities such as driving, swimming or exercise may be restricted for a short period post-surgery. The time taken to resume normal activities is variable and your ophthalmologist will advise you based on your individual circumstances.

You will be given instructions on how to take care of your eyes following your cataract surgery. Follow these detailed instructions for the best possible recovery.

Need to
know more?

Please contact the Lions Eye Institute to make an appointment with one of our ophthalmologists.
Phone: (08) 9381 0777; email: carecentre@lei.org.au; or see our website: lei.org.au