

Cataract

***“Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.
Immediately they received their sight and followed him.” Matthew 20:34***

A cataract occurs when the lens of the eye becomes cloudy. The lens is the clear part of the eye, which allows light and images to reach the retina, located at the back of the eye. This clouding happens gradually, and if left untreated, will eventually cause blindness. Luckily, we live in a time when cataracts can be easily treated with surgery. Half of all Americans over the age of 80 either have a cataract, or have had cataract surgery.

There are a wide range of things that can cause cataracts. They can be the result of long term exposure to ultraviolet light (from sunlight and tanning booths), or exposure to radiation. Diabetics and the elderly have higher rates of cataracts. Cataracts are sometimes the result of an eye injury. Sometimes babies are born with them, or they develop in early childhood. Smoking and alcohol use increase the risk for developing cataracts.

The most common symptoms of cataracts are:

Blurred vision

Colors fading, with the inability to identify blues and purples

Glare or halo from headlights or the sun

Difficulty seeing at night.

Double vision or multiple images in one eye

In the early stages, cataracts may be treated with new glasses, brighter lighting, and anti-glare sunglasses. As long as you can read, drive, and watch TV, nothing else needs to be done. However, when these steps no longer help, surgery is the only solution. In the United States, cataract surgery is one of the safest and most common of all surgeries.

Surgery is done at a hospital or special eye clinic by a specialist. The patient will be given many eye drops, and an intravenous infusion (IV) is started. The eye is numbed while mild sedation is given through the IV. This is not a painful surgery, and the patient can go home soon afterward. A patch is placed over the eye to protect it from accidental rubbing or itching. Only one eye is done at a time, with a wait of a few weeks between surgeries if both eyes need to be fixed.

There are some theories regarding the prevention of cataracts. Some people believe that wearing sunglasses with UV protection and a hat with a brim will protect the eyes from the sun and reduce the chances of getting cataracts. It has been suggested that antioxidants such as Vitamin's C and E will lend protection. After the age of 60, everyone should have an eye exam which includes dilation every two years. This is not just to diagnose cataracts, but other eye diseases as well.

Your eye sight is precious, take good care of it!

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Blessings, Nurse Karen