

## CATARACT

### What is a cataract?

A cataract is the progressive clouding of the natural lens inside the eye.

The lens is a transparent structure within the eyeball, located behind the pupil. The lens focuses the light rays onto the light-sensitive cells in the retina (which lines the back of the eye) to form a clear image that is then carried to the brain via the optic nerve. The lens must be clear in order to focus the light properly. When a cataract occurs, the lens loses its transparency. The cloudy lens blocks or distorts the light rays passing through the eye and causes blurred vision.

A cataract is not a tumour or a growth over the eye. It is a physical change that occurs most commonly due to aging. By the age of 75, about 70% of people will have developed cataracts.

Cataract causes the following symptoms:

- Blurry/cloudy vision
- Glare or light sensitivity
- Fading or “yellowing” of colours
- Poor night vision
- Double vision
- Frequent changes to your glasses or contact lenses prescription.



### How is cataract treated?

Early symptoms may be improved with new glasses, brighter lighting or magnifying lenses. Once cataracts have formed, no eye drops or medications are able to treat cataract; the only effective remedy is surgery. The timing of surgery is dependent on the degree of visual impairment, and its impact on your daily activities.

Cataract surgery only treats the problem of an opaque or cloudy lens, other eye diseases are unaffected and not treated by cataract surgery.

### CATARACT SURGERY

#### The principle

During a cataract operation the cloudy lens is removed and replaced with a clear artificial lens (intraocular lens = IOL). The implanted lens does not degrade with time, and rejection and/or allergic reactions do not occur. There are a large variety of lenses available; with different designs, shapes and sizes, and can be classified as follows:

- **Monofocal**- these improve your distance *or* near vision, not both, so you will still need to wear glasses for either near or distance.
- **Multifocal** – these offer clear distance, middle and near vision. About 1% of people find that they cannot get used to them and opt for an operation to exchange the lens.
- **Toric** - these lenses correct astigmatism, and can be incorporated into monofocal or multifocal lenses

#### Preparation

At your initial assessment, we will perform a thorough examination of all parts of the eye. Your pupils might have to be dilated, so you will not be able to drive yourself home.

### **On the day of your surgery**

The operation is performed as a day procedure so you will not stay over in hospital, but you will need someone to drive you home.

On the day of the operation the eye is measured to calculate the correct strength of the intraocular lens (IOL) for implantation.

The anaesthetist will get an impression of your general health. In the majority of cases the operation is performed under topical anaesthesia with only eye drops. Injections around the eye are sometimes used to numb the eye. You will receive sedation prior to this injection so that there is minimal/no discomfort. The surgery is pain-free, and you will be supervised throughout the surgery by the anaesthetic team.

### **Surgical technique**

Cataract surgery has a very high success rate, and is considered to be a very safe procedure.

There have been many advances in recent years such as the use of small incisions that don't require stitches, the use of ultrasound to safely and efficiently break-up the lens, foldable intraocular lenses (IOLs), specialised IOLs (toric and multifocal IOLs) and the effective prevention of infection.

The duration of the surgery is 15 to 20 minutes.

### **Post-operative care**

The first check-up is done within 1 to 2 days of the surgery.

Use the prescribed eye drops for 3 to 4 weeks to ensure an uncomplicated healing process.

You can read and watch TV straight after the surgery.

Care should be taken to protect the eye. During the first week after surgery; avoid strenuous activity, bending or lifting heavy objects, and try to avoid getting dirt or dust into the eye.

You will be advised when you are ready to be tested for new glasses (usually 4 to 6 weeks after the surgery); reading glasses can be used during the first 4 to 6 weeks.

Recovery is quick and a normal routine is possible after only a couple of days.

### **Possible complications after cataract surgery**

Serious complications are very uncommon, but they do occur.

- Swelling or clouding of the cornea
- High eye pressure (glaucoma)
- Bleeding within the eye
- Swelling of the retina
- Infection
- Drooping eyelid (ptosis)
- Retinal detachment
- Partial or complete loss of vision

***\* Please consult your doctor immediately if you are concerned.***

### **Can a cataract return after surgery?**

A cataract cannot return because the lens has been removed. However the lens capsule, just behind the intraocular lens (IOL) implant, can become cloudy and cause symptoms similar to cataract, usually some time after surgery (months or years). This is treated with a YAG laser; the doctor makes a tiny hole in the capsule to allow light to pass through it. This is a quick, safe and painless procedure that can be done in the ophthalmologist's consulting rooms.