

Cataracts

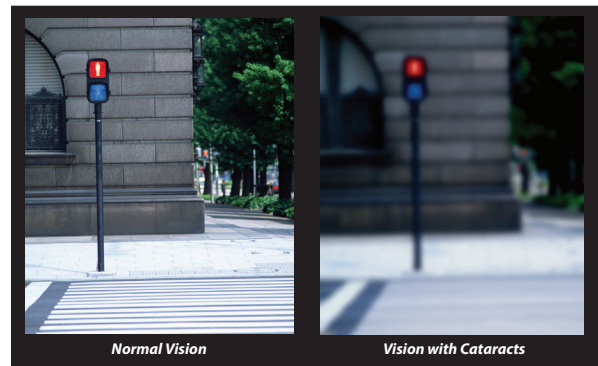
By **Jonna Jefferis**

A cataract is a clouding or darkening that develops in the eye's lens, which is normally clear. It can form when cells in the lens become damaged and clump together, blocking light from entering the eye. When the lens cannot focus light properly on the retina, vision is lost.

No one is sure what causes the cells to become damaged, but it is thought to be part of the natural aging process, as cataracts affect about half of all Americans over age 65. Occasionally, however, cataracts are seen in younger people and even newborns. They may also result from an injury or disease. Cataracts usually develop in both eyes, but often at different rates. Some take years to develop; others form within a few months. Your eye doctor will be able to determine if you have a cataract during a comprehensive eye exam.

Generally, there is no pain or irritation associated with cataracts. Symptoms vary, and may include:

- Blurred, double or distorted vision
- Appearance of dark spots or shadows that seem to move when your eyes move
- Growing need for more light to see clearly
- Gradual loss of color vision; colors may appear yellowed
- Worsening nearsightedness
- A temporary stage in which vision is suddenly better, and eyeglasses are not needed



Surgery is the only proven treatment for cataracts. It is usually not performed unless and until the cataract interferes with everyday activities. Early on, as the cataract develops, your eye doctor can prescribe changes in your eyeglasses or contact lenses to help you see more clearly.

Cataract surgery is fairly uncomplicated and recovery is fast. It is performed on an outpatient basis and has a 95% success rate. At the time of surgery and after the cataract has been removed, sight is restored by inserting an intraocular lens implant into the eye to replace its natural lens.

Cataracts are one of the most reversible causes of vision loss. That is why it's essential to get regular comprehensive eye exams. Regular check-ups are important to ensure that your vision is clear and your eyes remain healthy.

You can help maintain your eye health by limiting exposure to smoke and air pollution, exercising regularly, eating healthy foods and protecting your eyes with sunglasses and a hat while you are in the sun.

Sources: American Optometric Association, University of Michigan Health System Web site

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