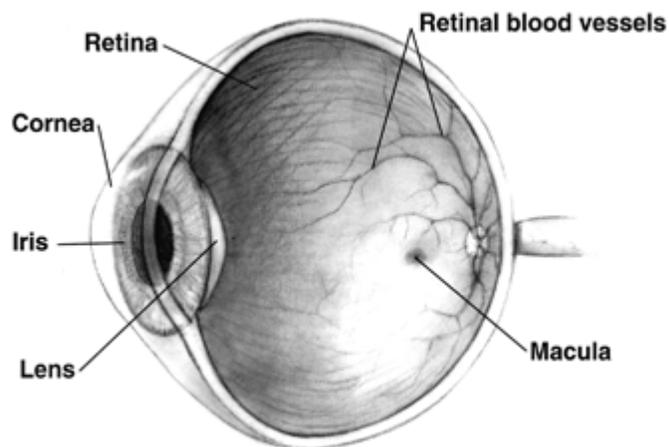


CATARACTS

WHAT ARE CATARACTS?

Cataracts occur when the normal clear eye lens becomes cloudy. The lens is the part of the eye that is responsible for focusing light and producing sharp images.



Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness worldwide and one of the most common causes of visual impairment later in life.

WHAT CAUSES CATARACTS?

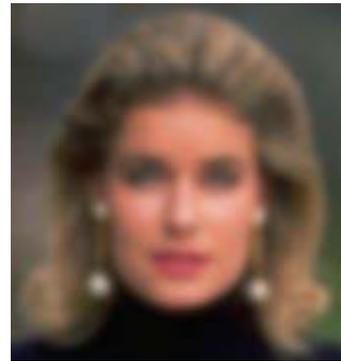
Cataracts form for a variety of reasons. They can be related to certain other diseases and can sometimes be part of the normal aging process.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Form slowly and are usually painless
- Blurred vision
- Lights seem less bright
- Frequent need to change eyeglass prescriptions without improvement in vision



Normal Vision



Cataract Vision

AM I AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING CATARACTS?

- Many people without diabetes develop cataracts, but people with diabetes are more likely to develop them.
- People with diabetes tend to get cataracts at a younger age and they grow in size faster.

HOW ARE CATARACTS DIAGNOSED?

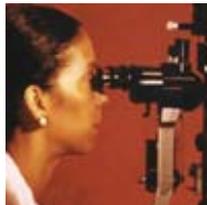
Cataracts are diagnosed by a regular eye examination.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR CATARACTS?

- For some people a stronger eyeglass prescription may be all that is needed.
- To help you deal with mild cataracts, you may need to wear sunglasses more often and use glare-control lenses in your glasses.
- Surgical removal of the cataract is the preferred treatment.

HOW CAN I PREVENT CATARACTS?

- There is no way to prevent the development of cataracts, but visual problems in general, can be detected early with regular eye examinations.
- People with diabetes should have their eyes examined by an ophthalmologist routinely once a year. If you already have eye disease, more frequent examinations may be needed.



REFERENCES / LINKS:

National Eye Institute:

http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/cataract/cataract_facts.htm

American Diabetic Association

<http://www.diabetes.org/>

Prevent Blindness America

http://www.preventblindness.org/eye_problems/doc_checklist.html

US Food and Drug Administration: FDA Consumer Magazine

http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2002/202_eyes.html

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



When you call to make an appointment:

- Be prepared to describe any vision problems you are having.
- Ask if you will be able to drive yourself home. Will the eye examination affect you temporarily?

Before you go in for your examination

Make a list of the following:

- Signs or symptoms of eye problems that you have noticed (flashes of light, difficulty seeing at night, temporary double vision, loss of vision, for example)
- Eye injuries or eye surgery you have had (approximate dates and where you were treated)
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.
- Questions about your vision.
- Your general health condition (allergies, chronic health problems, operations)
- Family history of eye problems (glaucoma, cataracts, etc.)

Take along the following:

- Your glasses, contact lenses or both
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking

During the examination:

- Asks questions about anything that seems unclear to you, such as the names and purposes of tests you may undergo.

- Ask if there are any changes since your last exam.
- Asks when it is best to call the doctor with questions.
- Find out when you should return for your next exam.

General Questions To Ask About Your Vision:

- What changes can I expect in my vision?
- Will my vision loss get worse? How much of my vision will I lose
- Will regular eyeglasses improve my vision?
- What medical/surgical treatments are available for my condition?
- What can I do to protect or prolong my vision?
- Will diet, exercise or other lifestyle change help?
- If my vision can't be corrected, can you refer me to a specialist in low vision?
- Where can I get vision rehabilitation?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities like reading, sewing, cooking, or fixing things around the house?
- What training and services are available to help me live better and more safely with vision problems?

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



Endorsed by: VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention