

Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals **NHS**  
NHS Trust

Oxford Eye Hospital

# Cataract surgery

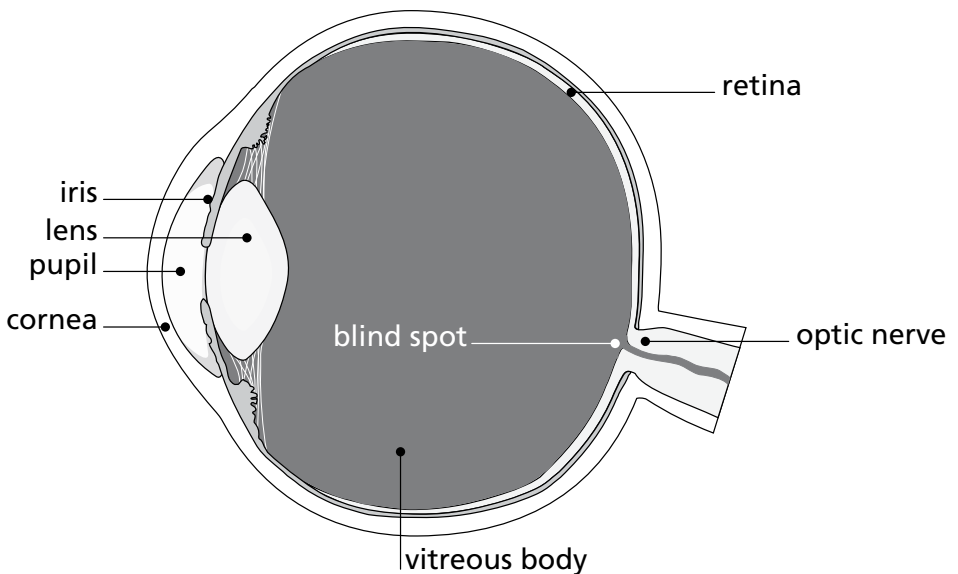
Information for patients



# What is a cataract?

A cataract is a condition affecting the lens of the eye which causes the normally clear lens to become cloudy. This restricts the amount of light that is able to enter the eye, which results in blurred vision, and often dazzle and glare.

The lens is situated inside the eye behind the pupil and iris and is responsible for providing a clear image.



The cause of cataracts is most commonly related to old age but can occur at any age for numerous reasons. The common belief that a cataract has to be “ripe” for it to be removed is incorrect. Cataract surgery can be undertaken at any stage of cataract formation, but generally this is done when reduced vision affects your life style.

Usually cataracts develop gradually and can often go unnoticed at first.

# Treatment

The only way a cataract can be treated is by an operation to remove the cloudy lens. This is a keyhole type operation using a very small incision (cut) into the eye. This does not involve the use of lasers. A lens implant is inserted into the eye to replace the natural lens. A stitch or two may be used in the eye as part of the surgery, but often none are needed.

The operation is normally carried out as a day case procedure under a local anaesthetic (you will be awake). Some patients may need to stay overnight for medical or social reasons.

If you have cataracts in both eyes we will only operate on one eye at a time in order to give the first eye time to heal.

# Alternatives

The only way to restore your vision is by having the cataract removed by surgery although there is some evidence that a good diet can slow the development of age related cataract. Please see the RNIB website for details: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/eyehealth/lookingafteryoureyes>

# Pre-operative assessment and preparing for your operation

You will have a pre-operative assessment before your surgery. This will take place at the first outpatient visit OR a couple of weeks before the expected surgery. At

this appointment we will give you instructions on how to prepare for your operation.

Consent for surgery will be taken by the surgical team and the risks of the operation will be explained to you at this time. The nurse will also conduct "Biometry" measurements which calculate the power of lens implant that is best suited to your eye. Everyone's eye needs a slightly different implant power and we take considerable effort to make sure the measurements are correct. Sometimes this involves a more in depth measurement process.

## What to bring with you

Please bring your current medications with you on the day of admission for surgery. Unless you are staying overnight there is NO need for an overnight bag

## The day of your operation

You will be admitted early on the morning of your operation, or late morning if your operation is to take place during the afternoon. The nurse will carry out various pre-operative checks and the surgeon will undertake an eye examination and ask you to sign a consent form if this hasn't already been done. You do not have to undress for the operation but are advised to wear clothing that is loose around your neck. We ask you to wear an "operation gown" over your clothes.

# How long does the operation take?

The operation usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes to perform.

## After the operation

The eye will be covered with an eye pad for a short time. This will be removed an hour after the surgery. The eye is then examined and a protective eye shield placed over the eye to be worn at night for the next 2 weeks.

We will give you eye drops to put into the eye after surgery 4 times a day, beginning the next day. You will usually need to continue using the drops for 2-3 weeks after the operation. The eye drops help to prevent infection and reduce swelling.

There is very little pain associated with this operation, but some patients find that painkillers such as paracetamol tablets help to reduce any mild pain.

You may notice that your eye is more sensitive to light after the operation. This is a normal complication and the use of ordinary sun glasses is recommended in this case.

# How will my vision be after the operation?

In the majority of cases an improvement in vision is noticeable within the first few days of surgery. However, the time it takes can vary widely between patients and greatly depends on your eye health – e.g. any other eye problems.

Your best vision may not be achieved until glasses are prescribed by your Optician. This does not happen until the eye has had time to heal, approximately 4-6 weeks after surgery.

## What are the risks?

All operations have some risk and eye surgery is no exception.

- There is a small risk that vision will not be better, or that it is worse after a cataract operation. This is either because there is some other problem with the eye (such as macular degeneration) or rarely, because of complications related to the operation itself, such as bleeding, infection or retinal detachment. The likelihood of a complication with the operation is in the region of 1 in 1,000.
- About 1 in every 3 patients need laser treatment to clear clouding of the lens capsule (where the implant sits) a few months or a couple of years after the surgery. This is done in the outpatient clinic.

# Going home

You will need someone to collect you and drive you home and, if at all possible, stay with you for the first 24 hours.

## Instructions for after the operation

- Do not rub or touch the eye.
- Avoid situations where the eye could be knocked. It is OK to look and bend down.
- Avoid contact sports and swimming for about one month.
- It is OK to read and watch television – they will do **no harm** to the eye.
- Protect the eye with an eye shield at night time and when washing your face for at least the first two weeks after the operation.
- Sunglasses may be helpful if the eye is sensitive to light.
- Keep putting in the prescribed eye drops until the Doctor tells you when to stop.

## Follow up

You will have an eye check with one of the nurse practitioners in the Eye Hospital within 2-3 weeks of the operation. Any sutures (stitches) inserted during your operation will be removed at this time. You are advised to see your Optician for new glasses AFTER this check as the removal of sutures can affect the final visual outcome by altering the shape of your eye.

# Signs to look out for after your operation

If your eye becomes painful, red or swollen and you notice a drop in the clarity of your vision, you should contact us through the Eye Emergency Department as soon as possible.

The contact number is **01865 234800**.

## How to contact us

If you have any questions after cataract surgery please contact our nurses on 01865 231099 and leave a message. One of the nurses will call you back.

## Further information

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Cataract-surgery/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**.

When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

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