

Cataract treatment

What is a cataract?

A cataract is the clouding of the lens in your eye. As the cataract develops, light cannot enter the eye so easily and your vision gets worse. Cataracts are a major cause of poor vision in older people and early signs can be difficulty in recognising people and a glare in sunshine.

Why do cataracts occur?

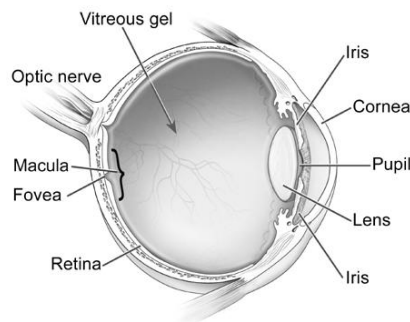
We do not know why cataracts occur. They are more common in people:

- who are elderly
- from sunny countries where ultra-violet light is stronger
- who have diabetes
- who are taking certain medicines.

A large number of people over the age of 60 have some problem with their vision because of cataracts; and over 120,000 people a year have cataract operations in the UK.

What is the treatment?

Cataracts can be successfully treated by an operation to remove the cloudy lens & replace it with a clear plastic lens called an implant. This operation will improve your sight. Once the implant is inserted it requires no attention and remains in place for life.



What happens after you see the eye specialist?

You will be placed on the waiting list for your operation. The operation takes place in the Day Surgery Unit at the Royal Free Hospital. We will send you details about the date of your cataract operation, where to come and what to expect.

Your appointments

You will be sent three appointments by the eye department. Please follow the instructions in your appointment letters carefully. They will tell you where to go; what preparation you need before the operation; and what happens after the operation.

The first appointment is to explain the operation in detail and to measure your eye for the correct implant. You will discuss which is the most appropriate lens implant for you.

Are there different lens implants?

As with spectacles, there are different types of lens implants; monofocal, bifocal and astigmatism. The surgeon will discuss with you the most appropriate lens to be inserted.

You will be asked to sign your consent form to confirm that you understand the procedure and agree to go ahead with it. Please bring:

- a list of any questions you have about your operation to discuss with the doctor
- your medication
- your most recent glasses prescription.

Implants, like glasses, come in different strengths and you will need to have your eye measured to find the strength that is most suitable for you. You may also need to have some blood tests and a heart tracing test (ECG).

The second appointment is for the operation itself. You will either go to the Day Surgery Unit, as in your appointment letter. The operation is performed under local anaesthetic. You will have an injection to numb the area around the eye, so that you may be aware of touch but you will not feel any pain. The operation takes about 30 minutes. Usually you will not have stitches. However, if you do have stitches, it does not mean that the operation has gone wrong, it is just more suitable for you. You will return to the ward with an eye pad over your eye.

After the operation

A nurse will give you details on how to look after your eye. You will be given eye drops before you go home to use for 4 - 6 weeks. These help to prevent infection and reduce swelling. You should be able to go home 2 - 3 hours after the operation. You must arrange for a friend or relative to collect you and accompany you home. You will need an optician's test for glasses 3 - 10 weeks after the operation, when the eye has settled properly.

The third appointment will be 2 - 4 weeks after your operation. The doctor will check the eye; advise you on looking after it; give you any further eye drops needed; and advise on a change of glasses.

What are the risks?

Cataract surgery is generally very safe. About one in twenty cataract patients have a problem following the operation, which can be corrected by time or treatment, for example: a red eye, soreness or swelling. About one in a hundred patients may have a serious problem following surgery such as glaucoma or retinal detachment. Please discuss this with the eye doctor if you are worried. Your sight is often much better immediately after the lens implant; but sometimes you have to wait until you have new glasses.