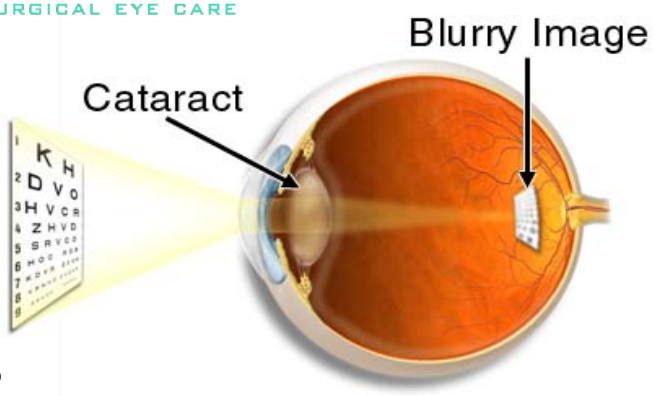
ISLAND EYE CARE
MEDICAL & SURGICAL EYE CARE



What is a cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye that affects vision. Cataracts can occur in either or both eyes. Most cataracts are related to aging. By age 80, more than half of all Americans either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery.

What is the lens?

The lens is a clear part of the eye that helps to focus light, or an image, on the retina. The retina is the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. In a normal eye, light passes through the transparent lens to the retina. Once it reaches the retina, light is changed into nerve signals that are sent to the brain. When the lens is clear, the retina receives a sharp image. If the lens is cloudy from a cataract, the image will appear blurred.

What causes cataracts?

The lens is made of mostly water and protein. The protein is arranged in a precise way that keeps the lens clear and lets light pass through it. But as we age, some of the protein may clump together and start to cloud a small area of the lens; reducing the amount of light which reaches the retina. This is a cataract. Over time, the cataract may grow larger and cloud more of the lens, making it harder to see. Other factors may accelerate the process, such as smoking or diabetes.

How can cataracts affect my vision?

1. When a cataract is small, the cloudiness affects only a small part of the lens. You may not notice any changes in your vision. Cataracts tend to "grow" slowly, so vision gets worse gradually. Over time, the cloudy area in the lens may get larger, and the cataract may increase in size. Your vision may decrease or begin to put more strain on your eyes.
2. The clear lens slowly changes to a yellowish/brownish color, adding a brownish tint to vision.
3. As the clear lens colors with age, vision gradually may acquire a brownish shade. The amount of tinting may be small and may not cause a vision problem. Over time, increased tinting may make it more difficult to read and perform other routine activities. This gradual change in the amount of tinting does not affect the sharpness of the image transmitted to the retina.

4. If you have advanced lens discoloration, you may not be able to identify blues and purples. This can affect many aspects of life from your attire to your diet.

Who is at risk for cataract?

The risk of cataract increases as you get older. Other risk factors for cataract include certain diseases such as diabetes, personal behavior such as smoking and alcohol use and the environment such as prolonged exposure to sunlight.

What can I do to protect my vision?

Wearing sunglasses and a hat with a brim to block ultraviolet sunlight may help to delay cataract. If you smoke, stop. Researchers also believe good nutrition can help reduce the risk of age-related cataract. If you are age 60 or older, you should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once every two years. In addition to cataract, your eye care professional can check for signs of age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and other vision disorders. Early treatment for many eye diseases may save your sight.

What are the symptoms of a cataract?

The most common symptoms of a cataract are:

- Cloudy or blurry vision.
- Colors seem faded.
- Glare. Headlights, lamps, or sunlight may appear too bright. A halo may appear around lights.
- Poor night vision.
- Double vision or multiple images in one eye. (This symptom may clear as the cataract gets larger.)
- Frequent prescription changes in your eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- If you have any of these symptoms, check with your eye care professional. These symptoms may also be a sign of other eye problems.

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