

What is a cataract?

The lens, which is located behind the iris, works much like the lens of a camera. The lens is a transparent, biconvex structure of the eye that helps to focus light, or an image, onto the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. The lens also adjusts the eye's focus (accommodation), letting us see things clearly both up close and far away. The lens must be clear for the retina to receive a sharp image.

The lens is made of mostly water and protein. The protein is arranged in a precise way that keeps the lens clear and allows light to pass through it. A change in the internal protein and water content of the eye, or clumping of the proteins, leads to cataract formation. A cataract is a clouding of the lens that affects vision. Most cataracts are related to aging and can occur in one or both eyes.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of a cataract are blurry vision, color perception changes, glare from lights, decreased night vision, double vision and more frequent changes in spectacle prescriptions.

Prevention

Wearing sunglasses and a hat with a brim to block ultraviolet sunlight may help to delay cataract progression. If you smoke, stop.

Researchers also believe good nutrition can help reduce the risk of age-related cataract as well as other eye diseases, such as macular degeneration. They recommend eating green leafy vegetables, fruit, and other foods with antioxidants.

Diagnosis and Treatment

An eye examination should always involve a comprehensive dilated eye exam by your optometric or ophthalmological practitioner. This is the only way that the lens can be evaluated in its entirety, along with the retina and posterior portion of the eye.

The symptoms of early cataract formation may decrease with new eyeglasses, brighter lighting, anti-glare sunglasses, magnifying lenses or low vision devices. If these measures do not help, surgery is the only effective treatment. Surgery involves removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with an artificial lens referred to as an IOL (intra-ocular lens implant).

A cataract should be removed when vision loss interferes with your everyday activities, such as driving, reading, or watching TV. Visual acuity may lead to speculation of visual function, but very often does not correlate with personal satisfaction. Even if you have low vision from other eye conditions, surgery may benefit you functionally and in your daily life.

Low Vision Rehabilitation

If you have vision loss from cataracts, or have residual vision loss after cataract surgery due to other eye diseases, low vision rehabilitation can help you maximize your remaining vision, making activities like reading and self-care less frustrating.

This process begins with a low vision optometric exam to determine the nature of your vision impairment. When this assessment is completed, your doctor will suggest a plan of care that may include use of optical devices, adaptive aids and a referral for individualized low vision rehabilitation.

If you have questions about low vision rehabilitation, visit www.parklowvision.com or call (316) 440-1690.

