Learn About Cataracts: Facts, Stats, and FAQs

The Facts About Cataracts

A cataract is a clouding of the natural lens inside the eye. A cataract cannot be removed “from” your lens. Rather, the lens itself must be replaced with an artificial intraocular lens or IOL.

There are many types of cataracts, but the majority of people develop nuclear cataracts, which are a natural result of the aging process.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a cataract?
Contrary to popular belief, a cataract is not a “film” over the eye. Rather it is a gradual thickening of the lens that causes the lens to become so clouded that light is either distorted or cannot reach the back of the eye (the retina) for transmission to the brain.

What are the symptoms of cataracts?
Blurry or dim vision, colors appearing faded, poor night vision, halos appearing around lights, and sensitivity to bright lights can all be symptoms of a cataract.

Age-related cataracts develop very slowly and painlessly. In fact, you may not even realize that your vision is changing until you find yourself going to the eye doctor seeking a change in your eyeglass or contact lens prescription.

What causes cataracts?
Many things can cause a cataract to form, the most common being the natural aging process. As the lens of your eye ages, it gradually thickens and yellows, eventually becoming so cloudy and discolored that you are said to have a “cataract.”

Other diseases, like diabetes and glaucoma, can increase the chances that a person will develop cataracts. Eye injuries and use of corticosteroids can cause cataracts as well.

How does a cataract form?
The lens of the eye can change in multiple ways, all resulting in the condition called a cataract. In general, there are two ways a cataract can form—at the nucleus, or center, of the lens, or at the cortex, or shell, of the lens.

To learn more about cataracts, treatment options, and life after cataracts visit


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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Are there different types of cataracts?
Yes, there are several types of cataracts. The different types are defined by which part of the lens they affect. Nuclear cataracts are the most common and usually form as a natural part of the aging process as cells from the lens deposit in the nucleus of the lens. Cortical cataracts are also fairly common and form when the shell, or cortex, of the lens becomes hard.

Is there anything I could have done, or do, to prevent cataracts from forming?
No. Since developing cataracts is a natural part of the aging process, it is highly unlikely that you can prevent their development. There things you can do to slow down their development, however:

- Wear sunglasses. Look for a label from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) that says that the lenses block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Eat a diet rich in anti-oxidants. There is some evidence, though it is not definitive, that indicates that those who eat foods rich in the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, like spinach and other dark green vegetables, are less likely to develop cataracts than those who do not.¹

Why do my cataract symptoms differ from someone else’s?
There are multiple types of cataracts, and even within the same type, there are a range of symptoms a person can experience.

Is developing a cataract an inevitable part of aging?
Yes. If you live long enough, you will develop cataracts.

Do certain diseases or conditions make a person more likely to develop cataracts?
Yes. Diabetes and glaucoma both predispose a person to developing cataracts.

Can cataracts increase the chances that I will develop another eye condition?
Because a cataract affects the part of the eye that is responsible for refracting light, it will sometimes cause a refraction error such as nearsightedness or farsightedness. And rarely, if left to mature, a cataract can eventually become so large that it causes a type of glaucoma.

Is presbyopia related to cataracts?
No. As the natural lens of the eye ages, it often hardens and is less able to flex and focus light. This hardening is often accompanied by a loss of flexibility in the surrounding muscles. This hardening and loss of flexibility is commonly called presbyopia. But because presbyopia is a function of aging, many people with cataracts also have presbyopia. In recent years, multi-focal intraocular lenses have been developed to correct for both cataracts and presbyopia.

Can cataracts spread from one eye to the other?
No. However, a person can develop cataracts in both eyes.

Can I go blind from cataracts?
Yes. When left untreated, cataracts will cause blindness.

What does it mean when someone says a cataract is “ripe?”
This is a colloquial way of saying that the cataract affects vision enough that the benefits of removing it outweigh the risks.


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