

Cataracts

A cataract is a cloudiness of the natural lens of the eye. The lens sits in the middle of the eye right behind the colored part of the eye (iris). As we age, the proteins in the lens harden and lose clarity. Vision is decreased and the ability to see true colors may be impaired with a cataract present. Glare symptoms are typical with cataracts (i.e. it may be hard to drive at night or read if the light is not just right). Besides aging, other causes of cataracts include heredity, diabetes, steroid use, metabolic diseases, and injury. We know that ultraviolet light exposure and smoking increase the risk and severity of cataracts.

Cataracts are not harmful to the eye. They usually are slowly progressive (over years). Once the cataracts decrease the vision to worse than 20/40 and the patient is bothered by the decreased vision, an operation can be performed to remove the cataract. Once the cataract is removed, it can never grow back. A lens implant is usually placed in the eye at the time of surgery in place of the cataractous lens. Sometimes, a cloudy membrane can form behind the lens implant. This membrane can be cut away quickly and easily with a laser in the clinic.

Cataracts can shift the glasses prescription. Since the cataract may be limiting vision, getting new glasses may not make the vision as clear as the patient would like. The glasses prescription may also fluctuate when a cataract is present.

The most current technique for cataract surgery is clear-corneal incision ultrasound-assisted cataract removal under topical anesthesia (drops to numb the eye instead of a needle). It typically takes 10-15 minutes to perform. The lens implant is chosen so as to leave the patient with the least dependence on glasses post-operatively. There are lens implants available that correct for astigmatism and for both distance and near vision, but the patient dissatisfaction rate with these lenses is still too high for Dr. Gray to recommend them. While generally a quick and successful procedure, there are risks associated with cataract surgery. The doctor will discuss these risks with you if you are considering having the surgery.