

Cataracts

What is a cataract?

A cataract is opacification of the crystalline lens. Situated behind the coloured part of your eye, the lens is a clear piece of tissue through which light passes. Cataracts are hazy patches in the lens that block daylight in a similar way to clouds blocking sunlight. Eventually the lens will become so misty that light can filter through but it is so scattered that the image is not accurately focussed on the retina. The cloudier the lens becomes, the more your eyesight will be impaired.

What causes cataracts?

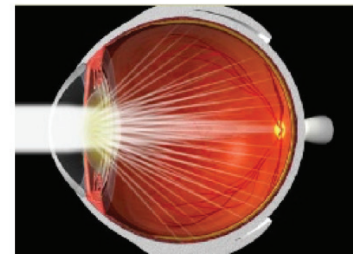
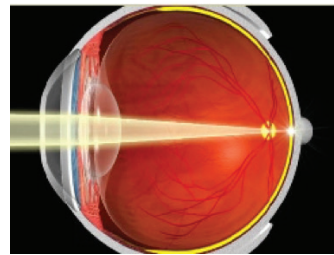
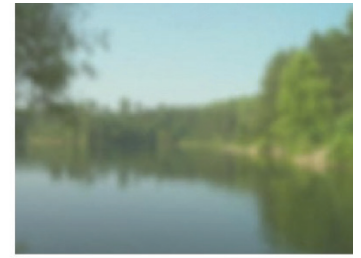
Cataracts are caused by changes in the lens protein of the eye, making them cloudy. This is usually age-related, but there are certain factors that can increase your risk of developing cataracts. These include: diabetes; sunlight (UV); smoking; use of steroids; poor nutrition.

What are the symptoms?

Cataracts often develop in both eyes, but at different rates of progression. Common signs of cataract include an increase in myopia, difficulty seeing in very dim or bright conditions, glare when facing towards strong light, washing out of colours, and problems focussing on written words or a TV picture.

How can cataracts be diagnosed?

An optometrist or an ophthalmologist can detect the presence or onset of cataracts using an ophthalmoscope to look into your eyes. It is quite common to be diagnosed with cataracts during a routine eye examination before you



Clear Lens

Cataract

have any symptoms. If the cataract is not causing any visual difficulties your optometrist will monitor it.

What is the cure?

If you do develop cataracts then often a change in your spectacle prescription will improve the vision. If the vision is still not good enough then it is possible to remove the cataracts. This involves a small operation, usually under local anaesthetic as an outpatient. An ophthalmologist surgeon breaks down the lens into tiny pieces using ultrasound then sucks the fragments out through a small incision in the cornea. A bespoke artificial lens is then inserted, designed to remain in place permanently. It is frequently possible to go home almost as soon as surgery is over, and recuperation should be straightforward.

Regular eye examinations are recommended to monitor the health of the eyes.