

## What are Cataracts?

A cataract is a cloudy area in the lens of your eye (the clear part of the eye that helps to focus light). Cataracts are very common as you get older. In fact, more than half of all Americans age 80 or older either have cataracts or have had surgery to get rid of cataracts.

At first, you may not notice that you have a cataract. But over time, cataracts can make your vision blurry, hazy, or less colorful. You may have trouble reading or doing other everyday activities. Over time, cataracts can lead to vision loss.

**The good news is that surgery can get rid of cataracts. Cataract surgery is safe and corrects vision problems caused by cataracts.**

## What are the types of cataracts?

Most cataracts are **related to age** — they happen because of normal changes in your eyes as you get older. But you can get cataracts for other reasons — like after an eye injury or after surgery for another eye problem (like [glaucoma](#)).

No matter what type of cataract you have, you'll need surgery to treat it.  
[Learn more about the types of cataracts](#)

[Learn](#)

## Did you know?

You can get cataracts in one eye or both eyes — but they can't spread from one eye to the other. By age 80, most people either have cataracts or have had cataract surgery. Cataract surgery is one of the most common operations in the United States

## What are the symptoms of cataracts?

You might not have any symptoms at first, when cataracts are mild. But as they grow, cataracts can cause changes in your vision. For example, you may notice that:

- Your vision is cloudy or blurry
- Colors look faded
- You can't see well at night
- Lamps, sunlight, or headlights seem too bright
- You see a halo around lights
- You see double (this sometimes goes away as the cataract gets bigger)
- You have to change the prescription for your glasses or contact lenses often

Talk with your eye doctor if you have any of these symptoms — they could also be signs of other eye problems.

## Am I at risk for cataracts?

Your risk for cataracts goes up as you get older. You're also at higher risk if you:

- Have certain health problems, like diabetes
- Smoke
- Drink too much alcohol
- Have a family history of cataracts
- Have had an eye injury, eye surgery, or radiation treatment on your upper body
- Have spent a lot of time in the sun
- Take steroids — medicines used to treat some health problems, like arthritis or allergies

If you're worried you might be at risk for cataracts, talk with your doctor. Ask if there's anything you can do to lower your risk.

### **What causes cataracts?**

Most cataracts happen because of normal changes in your eyes as you get older.

When you're young, the lens in your eye is clear. Around age 40, the proteins in the lens of your eye start to break down and clump together. This clump makes a cloudy area on your lens — known as a cataract. Over time, the cataract gets worse and makes more of your lens cloudy. [Learn more about what causes cataracts](#)

### **How can I prevent cataracts?**

You can take steps to protect your eyes from cataracts:

- **Protect your eyes from the sun.** Wear sunglasses and a hat with a brim to block the sun.
- **Protect your eyes from injury.** While doing activities like using power tools or playing certain sports, wear protective eyewear to protect your eyes from getting accidentally injured.
- **Quit smoking.** If you're ready to quit, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) for free support.
- **Make eye-healthy food choices.** Eat plenty of healthy foods — like fruits and vegetables, leafy greens, nuts, and whole grains.

### **How will my eye doctor check for cataracts?**

An eye doctor can check for cataracts as part of a dilated eye exam. If you're age 60 or older, get a dilated eye exam every 1 to 2 years. The exam is simple and painless — your doctor will give you some eye drops to dilate (widen) your pupil and then check your eyes for cataracts and other eye problems. [Learn what to expect from a dilated eye exam](#)

### **What's the treatment for cataracts?**

Surgery is the only way to get rid of a cataract, but you may not need to get surgery right away.

**Home treatment.** Early on, you may be able to make small changes to manage cataracts. You can do things like:

- Use brighter lights at home or work
- Wear anti-glare sunglasses
- Use magnifying lenses for reading and other activities

**New glasses or contacts.** A new prescription for eyeglasses or contact lenses can help you see better with cataracts early on.

**Surgery.** Your doctor might suggest surgery if your cataracts start getting in the way of everyday activities like reading, driving, or watching TV. During cataract surgery, the doctor removes the clouded lens and replaces it with a new, artificial lens (also called an intraocular lens, or IOL). This surgery is very safe, and 9 out of 10 people who get it can see better afterwards. [Learn more about cataract surgery](#)

Talk about your options with your eye doctor. Most people don't need to rush into surgery. Waiting to have surgery usually won't harm your eyes or make surgery more difficult later. Use these tips:

- Tell your doctor if cataracts are getting in the way of your everyday activities
- See your doctor for regular check-ups
- Ask your doctor about the benefits and risks of cataract surgery
- Encourage family members to get checked for cataracts since they can run in families

### **What's the latest research on cataracts?**

Scientists are studying what causes cataracts and how we can find them earlier and treat them better. NEI also funds research on new treatment options.

Source: [www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/cataracts](http://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/cataracts)

Source: [Cataracts | National Eye Institute \(nih.gov\)](#)