



Cataract - What You Should Know

In the last issue, we shared with you about Glaucoma – the different types of glaucoma, the signs and symptoms as well as the types of treatment available. In this issue, we bring you information on another predominant eye condition – Cataract that plagues many elderly in Singapore.

Cataract is the most common cause of poor vision in the elderly. It is a clouding of the lens of the eye. The lens is a clear disc within the eyeball, situated behind the pupil. It focuses incoming light rays to form a sharp, distinct image onto the retina, similar to the way a camera lens focuses an image onto the film. A cataract acts like a dirty or cloudy camera lens, blocking light rays from entering the eye, thus blurring vision.

Cataract is neither a tumour nor an abnormal growth of tissue in the eye. It is a physical change in the contents of the lens, resulting in its clouding and it is easily detected by doctors.



What Are The Different Types of Cataract?

The different types of cataracts can be categorised according to its underlying causes:

Senile Cataract

The most common cause is due to aging. In senile cataract, the normal aging process hardens and opacifies the lens. This condition affects adults above 50 years old.

Diabetic Cataract

A patient with diabetes mellitus is prone to cataract, causing fluctuating vision.

Traumatic Cataract

This is a condition where the lens is damaged due to an eye injury.

Congenital Cataract

Congenital cataract is present at birth. It is usually hereditary or caused by an infection that has affected the pregnant mother and her unborn child.

Secondary Cataract

Secondary cataract is cataract caused by other diseases of the eye or body.

What Are The Symptoms Of Cataract?

The main symptom is blurred vision. Other symptoms include glare, poor vision in bright surroundings, seeing multiple images and the need for frequent changes of spectacle prescription.

These symptoms can also be a sign of other eye problems. If you have any of the above symptoms, please consult your eye specialist.

What Treatment Is Available?

If a cataract affects a person's lifestyle, surgery is the only effective way to remove it. Fortunately, cataract surgery is highly successful with more than 90% of patients regaining good vision. This high success rate is attributed to advances in optical microscopes, wound suturing, effective prevention of infections and early actions. Most cataract surgeries are performed as a day surgical procedure without the need for hospital admission.

As cataract cannot be removed with laser or medication, the decision to remove the cataract should be made only after consultation with an eye specialist.

Vision may deteriorate several months after cataract surgery due to thickening of the posterior capsule. Fortunately, this can be improved with outpatient laser treatment known as *capsulotomy*.

Phacoemulsification is a recent advance in the technique of cataract surgery. Using ultrasonic power, the cataract can be removed through a smaller wound. Sutures are usually not required and visual rehabilitation is faster.

If the lens is removed, an artificial lens is substituted. This can be achieved in the following ways:

• Intraocular Lens Implants

These are artificial lenses placed in almost the same position as the natural lens of the eye. They are permanent implants which require no maintenance.

• Foldable Intraocular Lens Implants

The latest advances in implants technology, these implants can be folded and implanted into the eye through a small wound. The implants are then unfolded into its positions in the eyes. As these implants require only a small wound, visual rehabilitation is rapid and the visual outcome is excellent.

• Spectacles

Before intraocular implants, thick glasses were used to focus the light rays onto the retina. However, the "owl-like" spectacles are thick and heavy, and the quality of vision provided is poor. It is unsuitable for patients who require cataract surgery in only one eye. Today, spectacles are used only to correct mild residual power, if any, after the implantation of intraocular implants. As these prescriptions are generally very mild, these are thinner and lighter and thus provide much better visual quality.

• Contact Lenses

Contact lenses can be used in a similar way as spectacles. However, these require special care.

Cataract is a curable form of blindness. Do not ignore any eye symptoms or problems and go for regular eye check-ups with your eye specialist. Remember, early detection can prevent permanent blindness.

Where Can You Get More Information About Cataract?

For more information about cataract or to make an appointment to see our eye specialist regarding your eye symptoms, you may wish to call our Eye Clinic at 6772 5504 / 6772 5730.