

Cataracts

A Cataract is a clouding or frosting of a normally transparent lens. The lens of the eye is located behind the pupil and is typically transparent, allowing for light to be focused on the retina in order to produce a sharp image. When a cataract forms, which is usually, as we age, the lens becomes more cloudy or frosted and scatters or blocks some or most of the light. If a large portion of the lens becomes cloudy, one's sight can be partially or completely affected until the cataract is removed.

SYMPTOMS: include painless blurred vision, glare and a reduction in contrast.

Detection and Diagnosis

A cataracts is observed with special instruments as it usually cannot be viewed with the naked eye. An eye doctor examines the eye with a variety of instruments to determine the type, size and location of the cataract. It is important to visit with your optometrist or ophthalmologist for your comprehensive eye examination. If you notice any cataract symptoms, consult an eye doctor as soon as possible. Since cataracts most often form as a result of ageing, individuals over the age of 40 with a family history of cataracts should have their eyes checked periodically.

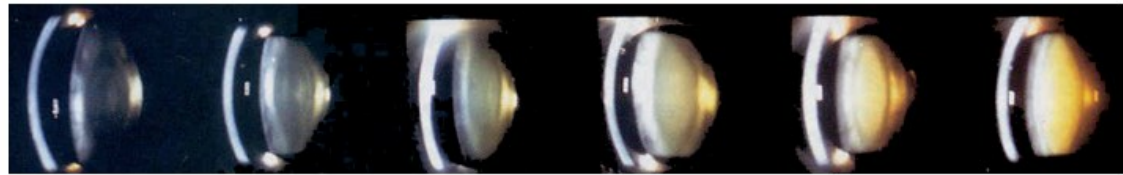


Figure 1A. Changes to our natural lens. Shown in this figure is the formation of a nuclear cataract. A nuclear cataract forms deep in the central zone of the lens. The far left lens is of someone at age 20 and towards the right the lens ages in increments of 10 up until age 70. After age 50, the lens yellows naturally with age and can cause decreased quality to your vision.

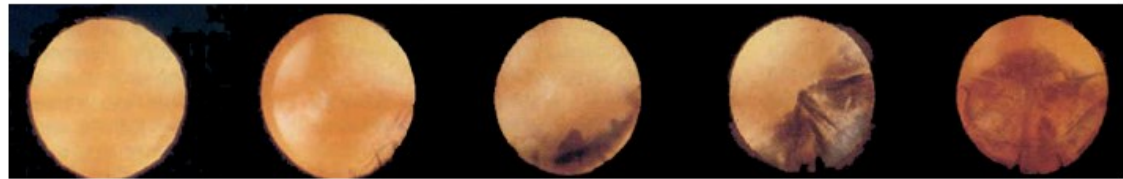
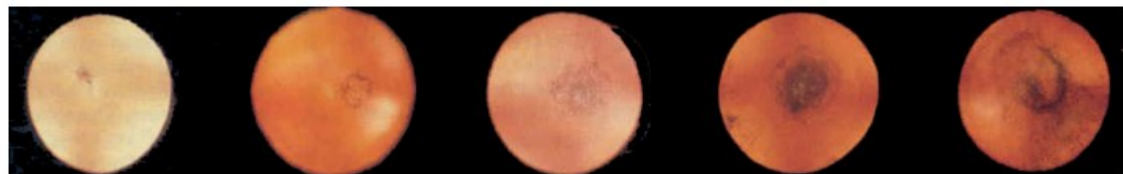


Figure 1B. Changes to our natural lens. Shown in this figure are different grades of cortical cataracts. From left right shows least advanced to most advanced. Cortical cataracts are characterized by spoke-like opacities that occur in the periphery of the lens.



Treatment

When a cataract causes enough loss of sight to interfere with a person's usual activities or lifestyle, it is probably time to remove them. The decision to remove a cataract depends on the individual's needs; and the patient and the eye doctor decide together when removal is necessary. Surgery, is usually performed under local anesthesia on an out-patient basis. The procedure, done on the average eye, takes around 15 to 20 minutes to perform per eye, and one eye is typically done at a time with a two to four week interval between the eyes. Lasers can often be used to soften the cataract and make removal easier. Recovery of vision from uncomplicated cataract surgery can take about 24-72 hours with a full recovery typically within the first week to ten days.

There is no known preventive measure for cataracts, but modern cataract surgery is highly effective and permanent vision loss is **usually** preventable. Once diagnosed, mild cataracts can be watched to see if they progress. If vision loss due to a cataract is interfering with your daily activities, there is usually no reason to delay surgical treatment. Fortunately, a cataract patient no longer needs to become nearly blind before cataracts can be removed.