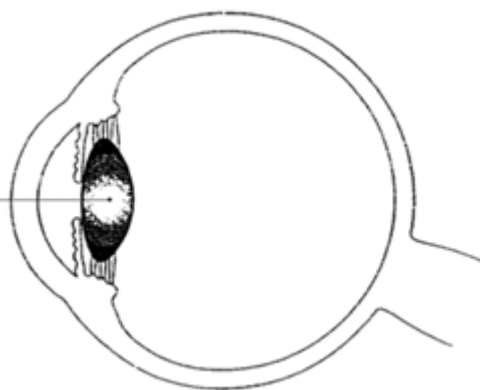


# What you need to know about cataract surgery

## What is a cataract?

Every human eye has a very small lens inside it, which focuses the light that enters the eye to create a clear, sharp image. When that lens becomes cloudy it is known as a cataract.

Cloudy lens inside the eye = cataract:



One or both eyes can be affected and, contrary to what you might have heard, a cataract is not a skin that grows over your eye.

As the cataract develops, it gradually restricts the amount of light entering the eye, and can cause:

- Blurred vision
- Fading of colours
- A change in your spectacle prescription
- Visual problems depending on lighting (for example glare or halos)

## What causes cataracts?

Most cataracts are the natural result of ageing but can also occur in younger people due to other reasons. Examples include:

- Trauma or surgery to the eye
- Diseases such as diabetes
- Prolonged inflammation of the eye

## What is the treatment for cataracts?

The only proven treatment for cataracts is surgery, where the cloudy cataract lens is removed and replaced by a perfectly clear artificial lens, known as an 'intraocular lens implant', allowing light to once again reach the back of the eye.

Cataracts can take many years to develop. Cataract surgery is generally considered only when the cataract has progressed to the point that your day-to-day activities are affected, otherwise there might be no benefit in having the surgery. However, it is not necessary to wait until a cataract is fully developed, or 'mature.'

There are rarely cases where insertion of an intraocular lens is not possible. In such cases, contact lenses or glasses will be prescribed in order to correct your vision.

## The pre-assessment clinic

At this clinic you will undergo all the tests necessary for staff to gather the information needed for your surgery to go ahead. You will also be given a chance to ask any questions or raise any concerns that you have. The clinical team will require information about your previous medical history, surgical history and current medication.

During your visit you will have eye drops put in to make your pupils larger. This could cause your vision to become blurred and increase your sensitivity to bright lights. We advise that you bring a pair of sunglasses to your appointment to help with this. You are advised not to drive for several hours after your appointment; therefore, you might wish to arrange for someone to accompany you.

A doctor or optometrist will assess the cataract and the general health of your eyes. They will discuss the benefits and risks of surgery and take your consent.

A nurse will measure the strength of your spectacles as well as the length and curvature of your eyes. This information will be used to calculate the strength of the artificial lens implant to be placed in your eye once the cataract has been removed.

This lens will allow you to be able to focus **either** on objects close i.e. reading/writing or far away i.e. driving/watching television but **not** both. Multi-focal lenses, which can enable you to focus on both near and distance objects, are currently not funded by the NHS. Our Trust does not currently implant lenses that correct astigmatism, known as toric lenses

These tests are not painful, and the nurse will explain what is happening at each stage.

Where possible, we aim to provide a date and time for the planned surgery to patients at the completion of the pre-assessment clinic visit.

Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

## Before your operation

We take the risk of infection very seriously as any eye infection around the time of surgery can result in loss of vision. For this reason, it is essential that you observe a strict personal hygiene regime to include the following:

- It is advisable that you wash your hands and face with anti-bacterial soap for 1 week prior to your operation to reduce the risk of infection.
- We recommend that you wash your hair and take a bath/shower the evening before surgery.
- Please ensure that clean clothes are worn on the day of surgery and that your footwear is also clean.
- We recommend that you wear a front opening shirt, blouse or dress that is loose fitting, for your comfort.
- If you normally wear contact lenses, please refrain from wearing them in the eye that will be operated on for a week before the surgery.
- Please refrain from wearing eye make-up for a week prior to the surgery and on the day please ensure all traces of make-up are removed prior to surgery.
- You should wear only minimal jewellery when you come to hospital.
- Please do not bring reusable handkerchiefs due to the infection risk that they create.

In order to reduce the risk of your operation being cancelled due to a condition called Blepharitis (a chronic inflammation affecting the edges of the eyelids, leading to a build-up of deposits on the skin and the eyelash margins), we would like you to perform the following lid hygiene for one week prior to your operation:

### **How to clean your eyelids using shampoo solution:**

- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after cleaning your eyelids.
- Mix one teaspoonful of mild baby shampoo (any brand) into a mug full of boiled water that has cooled down.
- Use a clean face cloth and dip in the solution. Put the cloth over your finger and gently scrub the edges of your eyelids and between your eyelashes to remove any crusting or scaly deposits.
- You must be careful not to touch your eye.
- Rinse your eyelids thoroughly after cleaning using cooled boiled water on a clean face cloth.

### **If in the days immediately before the planned surgery you start antibiotics prescribed by your GP or develop an infection anywhere in the body, such as:**

- A cough, cold or runny nose
- A urinary tract infection
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- A red or sticky eye
- An infected wound or skin infection (cellulitis)

**Please phone the unit straight away as we will not be able to proceed and will have to postpone your operation until the infection has resolved.**

### **On the day of surgery**

The Cataract Centre is situated on the first floor of Withington Community Hospital and is a mixed sex unit attending to both male and female patients.

On the day of surgery, you should eat and drink as normal and take all prescribed medication as normal unless you have been told otherwise.

If you are on anticoagulants for example warfarin, please ensure that you attend your anti-coagulant clinic appointments as usual. Please bring in your booklet provided by the hospital/clinic that you attend with the latest results readings.

If you are a diabetic patient; please bring snacks and drinks with you to have after your operation.

## On your arrival

You will be greeted by a member staff who will check your personal details and you will then be directed to the day surgery room. A friend or relative is welcome to wait with you during your stay in the unit but, as waiting space is limited, they might be asked to wait in an alternative area.

A nurse will show you into the main pre-operative room as soon as possible, where you will be seated in a chair. A locker will be available for you to lock away your personal belongings or clothes.

A nurse will identify themselves to you as your named nurse and they will be responsible for your care during your stay in the unit. The nurse will place a name band on your wrist or an identification label on your clothing and check whether there have been any changes in your general health.

## Your operation

There will be a nurse with you throughout your operation to make sure you are comfortable.

The operation is performed in the operating theatre and takes around 30 minutes. Most patients having cataract removal have the operation under local anaesthetic. This involves either drops on the eye, or drops in combination with a small amount of local anaesthetic that is squirted around the eye using a tiny blunt tube. Your eye could remain numb for 2-6 hours, which might affect your vision. No sharp needle anaesthetic is given at the Withington Cataract Centre.

During the operation you will be asked to keep your head still and lie as flat as possible. A nurse will be with you holding your hand (if you wish) during the time you are having the anaesthetic and operation.

**The operation will involve covering your other eye with a paper drape. If you have significant claustrophobia please let us know prior to coming in for your surgery.**

The most common way to remove the cataract is by a technique called phacoemulsification. A small incision is made painlessly in the front of the eye and a tiny probe is passed through the incision. The probe breaks the cataract into very small pieces, which are then sucked out leaving the clear lens capsule.

A plastic lens is then folded and passed through the incision into the lens capsule where it unfolds to its normal shape. The small incision usually heals itself, although occasionally a stitch is required. After the operation a pad or clear shield will be placed over your eye.

Immediately after the operation your eye will look red and you will feel a gritty sensation. These symptoms are normal and can take up to 4 weeks to settle down.

**The vast majority of patients experience little or no pain during or after the operation.**

## Following your operation

You will be transferred back to day surgery in your chair and will be given an information leaflet instructing you on the 'dos and don'ts' following your operation. It is advisable that you continue to use a bactericidal soap for 3 to 4 weeks after your operation to wash your hands and face to help prevent infection.

## General Information

- On the day of surgery, you will be given an appointment for your post-operative review (or if being followed up by your Optometrist the appointment will be sent out; the nurse will advise you of this on the day of surgery). The appointment for review is around 4 to 6 weeks after surgery but occasionally you might need to return to the hospital earlier and on more than one occasion.
- Paracetamol or your usual pain relieving medication will relieve any mild discomfort during the first 24 hours after surgery. If your eye becomes progressively more red and painful or if your sight worsens rather than slowly improves after the operation, you must contact the hospital immediately. The numbers are given in the information leaflet that you will receive following surgery.
- Your sight will be checked at the post-operative appointment. You will then need to attend your own optometrist for new reading glasses or varifocals as required.
- Talk to your ophthalmologist about returning to work and driving following your operation.

- For at least two weeks after the surgery it is best not to travel abroad or plan a holiday in case you develop problems with the eye and need to be seen as an emergency.

## Complications that can occur during or after cataract surgery

Cataract surgery is a very common operation that has a very good success rate, but like any operation, it carries risks. The cataract management team will take great care to limit the chance of these problems occurring. The commonest problem that occurs during cataract surgery is the lens capsule bag breaking.

In a recent national survey of modern cataract surgery this occurred in about 1 out of every 40 patients operated on. At the Manchester Royal Eye Hospital, this occurs less often: 1 out of every 50 operations in our most recent audit.

If the lens capsule bag breaks during the operation some of the cataract could float into the jelly at the back of the eye, and you might need to have a second operation.

The lens capsule bag supports the new lens implant. If the bag breaks, a different type of lens implant might be used, and stitches could be required. If this is the case, the operation will take longer and your eye will take a few weeks longer to recover, however the final visual result is usually the same.

The most serious sight-threatening problem that can happen during cataract surgery is internal bleeding inside the eye. Less than 1 patient in 1000 patients operated on will have this problem.

## Complications that can occur shortly after surgery

The signs and symptoms of potential complications and the action you need to take will be explained to you during your visits to the hospital and in additional information leaflets that you will receive.

A serious problem that can occur after the operation is infection inside the eye. In order to prevent this happening antibiotic drops are normally given after the operation. Serious infections are rare, affecting less than 1 patient out of every 1000 operated on.

If this complication does occur, it can result in the loss of sight.

Other less serious problems that can occur after the operation are:

- Inflammation inside the eye.
- A rise in pressure inside the eye.

- A temporary clouding of the cornea (the transparent window at the front of the eye).

## Long term complications

A common problem that could occur months or years following the cataract operation is clouding of the lens capsule bag behind the lens implant. If this occurs it can be treated using a laser beam to make a hole in the capsule allowing light to pass through to the back of the eye normally again.

After successful uncomplicated cataract surgery, some people might experience unwanted optical effects from the new lens implant, such as:

- Seeing a dark crescent in the outer vision
- Halos
- Glare

These are common experiences and are thought to be due to the properties of all types of artificial lens implants. They have no harmful effects on the vision. Very rarely, individuals might require further treatment for persistent problems but in most cases these symptoms gradually settle down.

The above outlines the most common complications associated with cataract surgery; however, this is not an exhaustive list. During your pre-assessment clinic, the staff will also discuss with you the risks and benefits of your treatment.

If you do not understand any of the information contained in this leaflet or require further information, please speak to a member of the nursing or medical team when you come for your appointment.

If you have any questions or are worried about any of the information provided in this leaflet please contact a member of the cataract services team on **(0161) 217 3008**  
**Monday – Friday, 7.30am – 4.30pm.**

If you require emergency treatment, you can contact the Emergency Eye Department which is open from 8.00am to 8.00pm every day. Outside of these hours please contact Ward 55 open 24 hours every day. These departments can be contacted via the hospital switchboard on (0161) 276 1234 asking to be put through to the Emergency Eye Department or the ward.



## Questions and Answers

If you have any questions you would like to ask the doctor or nurse but might not remember whilst you are here, this space is for you to write them down with the answers.

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