



Cataract surgery

What is a cataract?

Inside your eye, you have a natural lens that helps you to see. The lens should be transparent, like glass, but if you have a cataract, this makes the lens cloudy.

Not all cataracts need an operation and sometimes glasses will improve your vision. Cataracts can only be completely cured by surgery - no other medical treatment is currently available. During cataract surgery, the surgeon removes the cloudy lens from your eye and will replace it with a man-made lens.

In older people, cataract surgery is a common and quick operation that is almost always successful. But cataract surgery can be a little more complicated when you're young because your eyes are more delicate.

What happens before surgery?

To sort out your cataract, the ophthalmologist (eye doctor) will first have to decide what type of surgery is right for you. During the surgery, adults are given a local anaesthetic, where the eye goes numb but they are awake.

Children and teenagers are given a **general anaesthetic**, where they are put to sleep for the operation. Before the day of the operation, some

measurements will be taken of your eye using a scanner machine in the clinic.

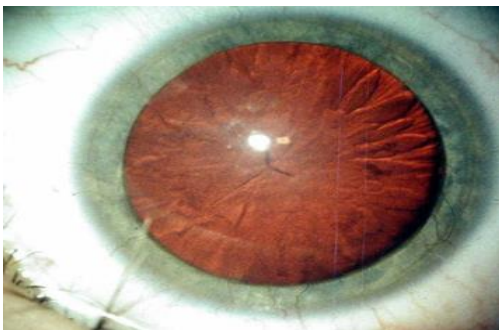
What happens during the surgery?

During the surgery, which takes between 30 to 60 minutes, the doctor will remove the lens with the cataract in it from your eye. Then they might fit an artificial lens (called an intra-ocular lens or IOL) inside your eye. After surgery, a pad might be placed over your treated eye for a while.

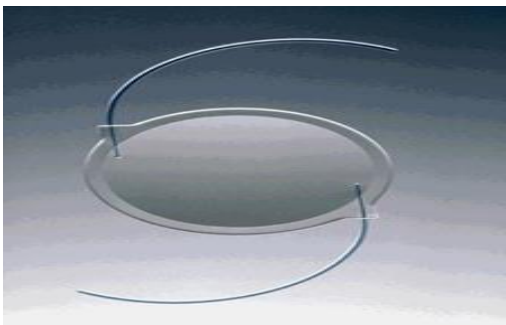
If you have cataracts in both eyes, each eye will need a separate operation, usually within a short time of each other. The two operations are not usually done together because that could increase your risk of infection. The pictures on the next page show what a severe cataract, a mild cataract and an artificial lens (IOL) look like.



A severe cataract



A mild cataract



An artificial lens (IOL)

After the surgery

Following your operation, you will need eye drops to prevent inflammation (redness and soreness) and infection.

The doctor will need to see you regularly but the clinic visits will be less often over time. If no artificial lens was placed in your eye, a contact lens will be fitted about two weeks after the surgery, or sometimes you may be given strong glasses. You might also need patching treatment to improve the eye with weaker vision.

Facts about cataract

- surgery is the only treatment to completely cure a cataract.
- an artificial lens or a contact lens will replace the natural lens removed during surgery.
- glasses may need to be worn after surgery.

Possible side effects

As a child or teenager, your eyes are very delicate and, as with all surgery, there are possible side effects. Most side effects which you may experience are mild and you can easily recover from them, for example soreness, redness and bruising. Listed below are some more serious possible complications. However, please try not to worry because as long as you are regularly checked by the ophthalmologist, it should be possible to quickly identify any problem.

Infection

Infection inside the eye (called endophthalmitis) is very rare but can cause severe damage to the eye. Keeping the eye clean and using antibiotic eye drops help to prevent it. If you do get an infection it will be treated with antibiotics.

Loose stitches

Stitches may be used to close the opening in your eye through which the lens was removed.



These may become loose and cause your eye to become sore and red. Some stitches may need removing.

Different eye appearance

Surgery can cause the shape of your pupil to look a bit different afterwards. It may become oval or appear off-centre, but this will usually not affect your vision.

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is where pressure inside the eye is increased which can gradually damage the nerve of sight and cause loss of vision. It may require treatment with drops, medicine or even surgery.

Amblyopia (lazy eye)

This occurs where visual development in one or both eyes has been temporarily held back. The usual way to treat amblyopia is to wear a patch over the stronger eye to encourage the weaker eye to work.

Strabismus (squint)

A squint or eye turn may develop and sometimes needs treatment with glasses or surgery.

Capsule thickening

The membrane behind the lens implant inside the eye can cloud over, which often happens in young people. It may need treatment by laser or more surgery.

The outcome

Not all children with cataract need surgery. When young people do require surgery it is not easy to predict how successful it will be. Factors that affect the surgery's success include how bad the cataract is and whether any complications happen after surgery. Surgery will improve vision for most children and young people who need a cataract operation, but there will be some children who continue to have poor vision afterwards.

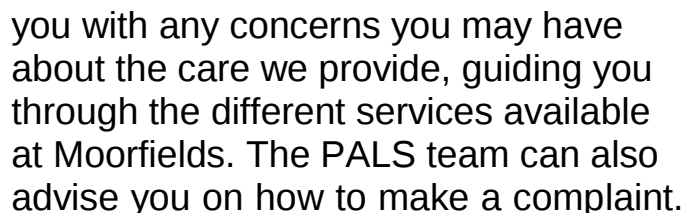
More information is available online at: www.childhoodcataracts.org.uk

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Moorfields' PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help



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