

CATARACT: SINGLE SURGERY DOUBLE BENEFIT

Dr. Mahipal S. Sachdev

When doctors diagnosed Ritu Rampal's deteriorating vision as a result of early onset cataract, she had a tough time getting used to the idea. It took her two years to mentally prepare herself for the surgery. But today, she wishes she had got the phacoemulsification surgery done as soon as she was diagnosed. Dependent on spectacles and contact lens since the age of 15, her post surgery vision is better than ever before, thanks to customized monovision lens. Today, she reaches for her spectacles first thing in the morning, only out of habit. She no longer needs spectacles or contact lens.

"The cataract proved to be a blessing in disguise. I had spent my entire adult life needing spectacles to see. But after the cataract surgery, I can see better than ever before," says the 48-year-old Emirates NVD executive.

Ritu's work as office manager for the chairman and CEO of the Emirates NVD involves long hours in front of the computer screen. So when her vision started to blur and she began having problems reading the road signages, she put it down to deteriorating myopia. "But when the doctor told me it was cataract, I could not believe it. After all, cataract was something that happens to old people. My mother has just started getting cataract at 74," she says. Ritu is among that part of the population that gets cataract early because of a variety of reasons. While age is the most common reason for cataract – age alters the proteins of the eye lens making them opaque - other causes include congenital and developmental anomalies, trauma, inflammation of the eye, metabolic disease like diabetes, hypothyroidism or even usage of certain drugs that may contain steroids.

"For two years, I kept postponing surgery, believing that I must let the cataract mature. I really enjoy driving and I had to curtail that. I could not read. I had problems at work. But on a visit to India, I consulted one of the ophthalmologist and was told that there is no reason to wait for the cataract to mature. I immediately booked myself for the surgery," she says.

"In fact, I think surgery is really not the right term to be used here. For me, getting my cataract removed was easier than going to a dentist," she laughs.

Ritu had to go in for a check-up four days before the surgery and she was prescribed a course of antibiotic eye drops to prepare her eyes for the surgery. On the day of the surgery, Ritu had already prepared herself by putting in drops to dilate her eye. "The worst thing about the surgery was that my eye-lashes had to be cut," she says.

On the operating chair, the doctor told her what he was going to do and asked her to relax. Her brother, who had accompanied her, was sitting outside where he could see her being operated upon on a live screen.

Phacoemulsification is done by making a tiny incision in the lens and breaking the calcified lens with a laser. The broken pieces are removed by aspiration and a foldable lens is inserted into the eye. In Ritu's case, the lens had been customized to her power.

"The procedure took about 10-15 minutes and by the time I was in the car, I could see," Ritu says. She got her second eye operated within a fortnight and today, she sees better than ever before.

"For me, it's like a new world. Everything is so clear and bright. What I am happiest about is that I do not need spectacles or contact lens anymore. I can wear all my designer sunglasses now. I am back behind the driving wheel and enjoying every moment. I just wish I had not waited two years for this," she says.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF CATARACT:

- Cloudy or blurred vision
- Change in one's perception of colors
- Sensitivity to bright lamps or sunlight
- Poor night vision
- Difficulty in driving especially at night
- Frequent changes in eyeglass prescription

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Surgery is the only treatment for cataract
- Surgery should not be delayed till the cataract is mature
- Any cataract which causes blurring of vision that interferes with one's daily activities should be operated
- Surgery can be done in any season with modern technology
- There are no diet restrictions and no need for bed rest

TREATING CATARACT:

What are the treatment options for cataract?

In the absence of any proven medical cure, surgery is the only treatment for cataract. The two common surgical options available for cataract surgery are:

CONVENTIONAL CATARACT SURGERY OR EXTRA CAPSULAR CATARACT EXTRACTION (ECCE)

- Requires an incision of 10-12 mm
- The cloudy eye lens is removed in one piece
- A hard plastic lens is implanted
- Multiple stitches are required
- Final glass prescription could take even up to 10 weeks

MICROINCISION CATARACT SURGERY (PHACOEMULSIFICATION)

- Requires a very small incision of 2.2 mm
- Cataract Extraction with Phacoemulsification and foldable lens implant
- Walk-in Walk-out procedure
- No injection, no pad, no stitch surgery
- Minimum post surgery precautions
- Quicker healing and recovery

The writer is DR. MAHIPAL S. SACHDEV, Chairman and Medical Director, Centre for Sight, New Delhi. Email: drmahipal@gmail.com