

FREEDOM FROM CATARACT - *All you ever wanted to know*

By Dr. Mahipal Sachdev

WHAT EXACTLY IS CATARACT? HOW DOES IT AFFECT VISION?

The human crystalline lens, which is clear and transparent, is part of the focusing mechanism of the eye. With age, the lens becomes cloudy and opaque, thereby hampering normal vision. Any opacity in the crystalline lens which leads to decrease vision is called "CATARACT" or "SAFEDMOTIA".

ARE CATARACTS FOUND ONLY IN THE ELDERLY?

About half the population by the age of 65 has cataract while most people have cataract in at least one eye by 75 years. But cataract is not found in old people alone. Some children may have congenital or developmental cataracts. Young adults may have cataract due to inflammatory disorders, trauma, steroid use, diabetes etc.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE CATARACT?

Cataract causes a gradual, painless loss of vision. It can cause glares /haloes around bright light. It can also cause diplopia or multiple images. If you feel your vision is deteriorating day by day and simple tasks are becoming difficult, you probably need to be evaluated for cataract. Consult an eye specialist for a detailed eye check up.

WHEN SHOULD I GET OPERATED FOR CATARACT?

Cataract surgery should be performed as soon as it begins to affect your daily activities. There is no need to wait for the cataract to MATURE as most people think.

IS IT SAFE TO GET OPERATED IN SUMMERS OR RAINY SEASON?

Season does not affect the outcome of cataract surgery. With sophisticated technology and expert post-operative care, one can get operated at any time of the year according to one's choice.

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR CATARACT?

Surgery is the only treatment for cataract. Phaco-emulsification with foldable Intra-ocular lens (IOL) implantation is the best and safest option. Using ultrasonic power, the cataractous lens is broken down into small pieces and sucked out using a vacuum base aspiration system. A new artificial lens is implanted in its place which allows you to see clearly.

WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS IOL OPTIONS?

There is a wide range of IOLs that you can choose from. Aspheric IOLs provide better contrast and neutralize the aberrations of the eye to provide a better quality of vision. People who want reduced dependence on glasses for both near and distance should consider multifocal IOLs. Patients with astigmatism will benefit from Toric IOLs in which the cylindrical power is incorporated within the IOL optic. Your eye surgeon will advise you regarding the best IOL option.

HOW LONG DOES THE SURGERY TAKE?

The average duration of cataract surgery is 10-20 minutes.

WILL I HAVE ANY PAIN DURING THE SURGERY?

Cataract surgery is painless and you can comfortably walk out of the operation theater after the procedure. It can be done either by using anaesthetic eye drops or by giving a small injection to anaesthetise the area around the eye. General anesthesia is used in certain situations e.g. in small children.

HOW SOON AFTER SURGERY WILL I SEE CLEARLY?

You may be able to see better almost immediately following the surgery, although most patients experience clear vision after two or three days. Recovery depends on various factors including any associated eye diseases and general health of the patient.

WHAT ARE THE PRECAUTIONS I MUST TAKE AFTER CATARACT SURGERY?

Use medications as prescribed by your eye surgeon. Wearing dark glasses for a few days to protect the eyes from dust and bright light is recommended. Normal activities including walking, reading, writing, watching television etc. can be resumed soon after surgery. You can start cooking whenever you feel comfortable.

WHAT ARE THE DIET RESTRICTIONS AFTER CATARACT SURGERY?

There are absolutely NO diet restrictions after cataract surgery. However dietary restrictions due to diabetes and/or hypertension should continue.

WILL I NEED GLASSES AFTER CATARACT SURGERY?

You may need to wear glasses to fine-tune your vision for distance and near. While multifocal lenses reduce your dependence on glasses, people who get mono-focal lenses will need glasses for near.

WHEN CAN I GET MY SECOND EYE OPERATED?

Usually both eye surgeries are not done together. If the recovery of first eye is good, the second eye can be operated even on the next day of first eye. It is as per the comfort of the patient and the doctor.

WHERE SHOULD I GET MY SURGERY DONE FROM?

Cataract surgery should be done at a centre which offers the latest technology combined with safety and expertise of the cataract surgeon. A complete eye care centre which provides comprehensive eye care facilities for intra-operative and post-operative care and follow up is ideal.

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