

## CATARACTS

### What is a cataract?

Over half of those over 65 have some cataract development, which is often too mild to warrant any treatment. If a cataract is more developed most cases can be treated successfully with surgery. A cataract is not a skin that grows over the eye – it is a clouding of part of the eye called the lens. Vision becomes blurred or dim because light cannot pass through the clouded lens to the back of the eye.

### What causes a cataract?

Cataracts can form at any age, but most often develop as people get older. In younger people they can result from an injury, certain drugs, long-standing inflammation or illnesses such as diabetes.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include:

**Blurred Vision:** "I'm not seeing as well as I used to" people may notice that some things seem blurred round the edges, or that your glasses seem dirty or scratched.

**Seeing Double:** The cloudiness in the lens may occur in more than one place, so that the light rays that reach the retina are split, causing a double image.

**Poor Vision in Bright Light:** Bright light or very sunny days may make it more difficult to see.

**Change of Colour Vision:** As the cataract develops, its centre becomes more and more yellow, giving everything you see a yellowish tinge.

### What can be done?

The most effective treatment for cataracts is a small operation to remove the cloudy lens. Diets or drugs have not been shown to slow or stop the development of the cataract.

### What is a lens implant?

When the cloudy lens has been surgically removed, it is usually replaced by a plastic lens so that the eye can focus properly. Occasionally a doctor will decide an eye is not suitable for a lens implant. In these cases contact lenses or special glasses will be prescribed instead.

## What happens after the operation?

Your sight will usually improve within a few days, although complete healing may take several months. It is a good idea to have some help at home if you can, especially if you find it difficult to put your eye drops in.

- You will need to take it easy for a couple of weeks so your eye can heal.
- Avoid rubbing your eye; wear an eye shield if you are a restless sleeper.
- Don't do any heavy lifting, and avoid strenuous exercise and swimming.
- You can do light housework or cooking but try to get some help if you can.
- You don't need to stay indoors but take care if it is windy, in case anything blows in your eye.
- Wash your hair leaning backwards rather than forwards.
- Avoid eye make-up for six weeks.
- You can resume your sex life a week or two after the operation.
- Avoid driving until your surgeon tells you it is safe.
- New glasses are usually prescribed four to eight weeks after the operation.

How long you are off work will depend on the job that you do. Ask your eye specialist about this.