

There are currently more than 24 million Americans age 40 and older who have cataracts, according to the *Vision Problems in the U.S.* report from Prevent Blindness America. It is the leading cause of blindness worldwide.

What are cataracts?

Cataracts are a clouding of the eye's natural lens that leads to a blockage in the passage of light into the eye. This affects vision and can occur in one, or both eyes. Cataracts are more common in older people but can occur at any age.

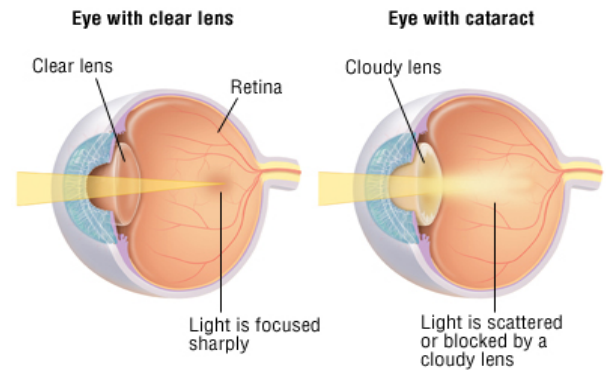
What causes cataracts?

The lens is made up of mostly water and protein which are normally arranged in a specific way to keep lens clear so that light can pass through it. As you age, the lenses in your eyes become less flexible, less transparent and thicker. Age-related and other medical conditions cause tissues within the lens to break down and clump together, clouding small areas within the lens which blocks the light as it passes through the lens. This prevents a defined image from reaching your retina. As a result, your vision becomes blurred.

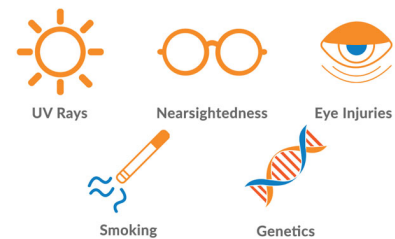
Who is at risk?

Risk factors include

- Aging
- Intense heat or long-term UV exposure
- Certain diseases such as diabetes
- Hereditary influences
- Eye injuries



Risk factors and causes of cataracts include:



Symptoms

Although cataracts do not cause pain, redness or tears, there may be changes in your vision that may be signs of cataracts.

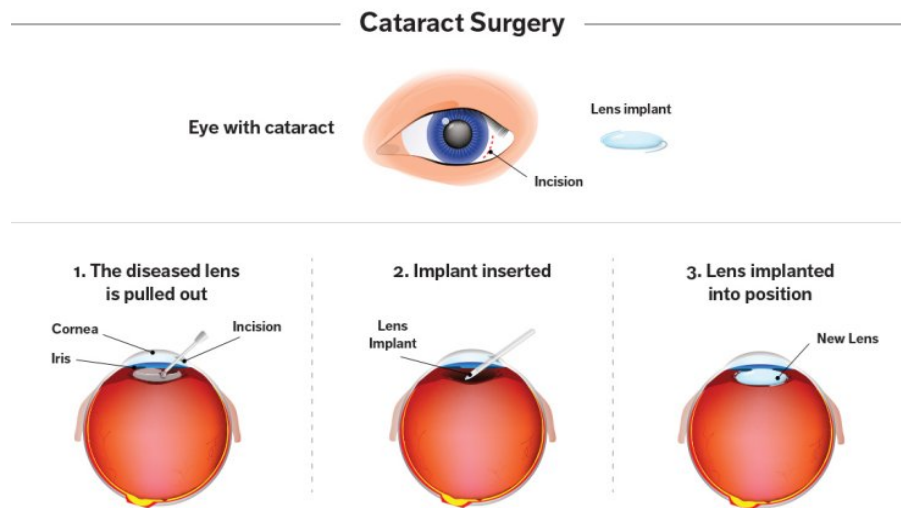
This includes:

- Blurred vision
- Double vision
- Ghost images
- The sense of a "film" over the eyes.
- Lights seem too dim for reading or close-up work
- Changing eyeglass prescriptions often. The change may not seem to help your vision.
- You may sometimes notice the cataracts in your eye. It may look like a milky or yellowish spot in the pupil (the center of your eye is normally black)



Treatment Options

One of the most common treatment options for cataracts is cataract surgery. This requires removal of the defected lens and replacing it with an artificial lens called an intraocular lens. The entire surgery lasts about 20 minutes, and most people can resume normal activities fairly rapidly.



Talk with your eye doctor about whether surgery is right for you. Most eye doctors suggest considering cataract surgery when your cataracts begin to affect your quality of life or interfere with your ability to perform normal daily activities, such as reading or driving at night.

Over 3 million Americans undergo cataract surgery annually, making it one of the most common surgeries in the United States.

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Reference: Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Cataracts.

<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/vehss/data/studies/cataract.html>. Accessed on May 25th, 2019. Updated on June 28, 2018.