

BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER YOUR CATARACT SURGERY GUIDE FOR ELDERS AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

WHAT IS A CATARACT?

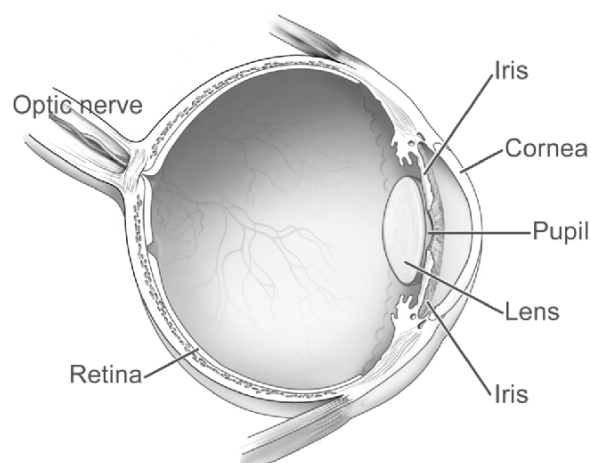
A cataract is a painless, cloudy area in the lens of the eye. The eye is like a camera. Normally, light passes through the clear lens to form a sharp image on the back of the eye. Cataract blocks the light. They cause blurring of vision, and sometimes other symptoms such as sensitivity to glare, faded colours, and reading difficulties. They are more common in older people. A cataract can occur in one or both eyes. It cannot spread from one eye to the other.

WHY ARE CATARACT REMOVED?

Cataract surgery removes the clouded lens of the eye and replaces it with a clear plastic lens to improve sight. You will not feel or see the new lens. It becomes part of your eye. If you have cataract in both eyes that require surgery, the surgery will be performed on each eye at separate times, usually four to eight weeks apart.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE CATARACT IS NOT REMOVED?

If you don't ever get treatment your lens will gradually become so cloudy that it will be impossible to see any detail. Things may start to look a little brown. Gradually you become blind and only light and dark can be distinguished. A cataract needs to be removed only when vision loss interferes with your everyday activities, such as working, walking or reading.



HOW EFFECTIVE IS CATARACT SURGERY? WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS AND HOW COMMON ARE THEY?

Cataract surgery has a success rate of about 90% in adults, with few complications and little or no discomfort. There is a very small risk of bleeding and infection. You can reduce the risk by following instructions (given below) after the surgery. Infection can result in loss of vision, but that is very rare. People often need reading glasses and glasses for distance vision after cataract surgery. Usually, vision is retested about six weeks after surgery and new glasses are prescribed.



WHAT HAPPENS DURING SURGERY?

At the hospital, drops will be put into your eye to make the pupil bigger. The area around your eye will be cleaned. You will have an injection to numb the nerves in and around your eye. The operation usually lasts 20 minutes and is almost painless. In most countries the operation is performed by an ophthalmologist. After the operation, a patch will be placed over your eye.

GETTING READY FOR SURGERY

Before surgery you will have a physical examination. You should be free from wheezing and chest infection. Your blood pressure should be normal. Your heart will be checked (ECG) and your blood sugar (before you have anything to eat).

You will be taken to hospital by a vehicle. There will be a caretaker for the group. If you need assistance tell the Program Officer in advance and you will be allowed to take a family member with you.

You can eat and drink as normal before coming to the hospital. Take all your regular medications. If you are currently using eye drops, ask the doctor in the hospital for advice about stopping these before surgery.

It is normal to feel frightened. But remember, this is a very straightforward, small operation and the surgeon is very experienced. If possible, talk to someone who has had cataract surgery. They will be able to reassure you.

WHAT TO BRING TO HOSPITAL

- A set of white clothes (shirt and sarong, or jacket and white cloth) and pair of slippers
- Any medicines you usually take
- Clinic book
- A plate and a cup
- Packed breakfast and lunch

YOUR HOSPITAL STAY

You have to be in the hospital in the morning (if Nuwara Eliya at 8.30am; if Kandy at 10.30 am). Check the exact departure time with your Program Officer.

You will bring your breakfast and lunch for that day. After that, meals will be provided by the hospital. Meals at the hospital might be different to the meals you have at home. Remember it is only for two days so try to eat what you can.

Surgery will be on the morning of the following day. Wear your white clothes on the day of surgery. The surgery takes about 20 minutes and is not painful.

The hospital will try to have someone present who speaks Tamil, but that is not always possible. Try to cooperate with staff in the theatre. Keep your head still and follow the staff's instructions.

After surgery, you will be moved to the ward. Your eye will be covered. Usually you will be discharged on the following day. But be ready to stay one or two more days in case the doctor wants you to stay in the hospital.

Before you go home, your doctor will review discharge instructions and ensure you have received a prescription for eye drops. Eye drops will be provided to you.

You will be dropped to your village or estate after the surgery.



WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER CATARACT SURGERY

Recovery varies with each patient, but most are back to normal within 24 hours.

You may have some discomfort or a slight headache for a day or two after surgery. Occasional tearing and a slight itchy, gritty feeling in the eye can occur in the days after surgery. This will pass. Avoid touching, rubbing or pressing on your eye. Wash your hands often. The eye may appear red or the eyelid swollen for a few days. Vision may be blurry at first and will improve over the next few days. Your eyes may be sensitive to light for some weeks after surgery. Sunglasses can be helpful.

HOW TO INSTILL EYE DROPS

1. Wash your hands. Shake the eye drop bottle before use
2. Tilt your head back and look at the ceiling. This can be done from a sitting or lying position
3. Using one or two fingers, gently pull down your lower eyelid to form a pocket
4. Keeping both eyes open, gently squeeze one drop into the eye pocket. Do not let the bottle top touch your eye, eye lashes, fingers, or any other surface
5. Close the eye for 30 to 60 seconds after each drop to let the drops absorb
6. Do not rub your eyes after putting in the drops
7. When using two or more eye drops, wait about three minutes after instilling the first medication before instilling the next



CARE AT HOME AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

When you get home, try not to bend from the waist to pick up objects on the floor. Instead bend from the knees. Do not lift any heavy objects. You can walk, climb stairs and do light household tasks. Avoid rubbing or bumping your eye for at least six weeks.

In most cases, healing will be complete within eight weeks.

You may bathe and wash your hair the day after surgery. But make sure you do not get soap or water in the eye for at least one week. Avoid swimming or submerging your head in water for at least three weeks.

You may watch television, read or go for walks. Avoid sleeping on the side of the eye that was operated on for at least two weeks.

You can eat normally after surgery. Avoid constipation and forceful straining during voiding and bowel movements. Restart all the regular medications you took before surgery.

GO TO THE EYE UNIT

- If your vision is getting worse, with increasing pain or ache in the eye
- If you see any new floaters (small moving spots in your field of vision), flashes of light or changes in your field of vision
- If you have nausea, vomiting or excessive coughing

FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS

Go to the Eye Unit after one week and at six weeks, or as the doctor advises.

Take your clinic book and the eye drops you are using.

If you have questions at any time ask your Program Officer or the eye doctor.

This document is an information handout which has been provided to elders in the Better Vision, Healthy Ageing Program before they go for cataract surgery. It contains information specific to the program, but could be adapted for use in other contexts.

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