

## Patient Information – Cataract Surgery

Just behind the iris, (the colored part of the eye), is the lens which is normally clear or transparent. The lens is important for focusing light onto the back of the eye (the retina) so that images appear clear and without distortion.

However, a natural aging process in the lens itself causes a cataract to develop. This causes the eye's internal focusing lens to cloud and impede your vision. For the majority of people, the cloudiness gradually develops over a long period that could span decades and could cause serious visual difficulty in both eyes by the time they are 60 or 70 years old. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for cataracts to develop rapidly in either one or both eyes simultaneously. Cataracts can also develop at a younger age, where it may be related to a previous injury to the eye, or use of medication such as steroids.

The most common ocular problem in the world and the principal cause of blindness, millions of cataract surgeries are performed every year the world over.

### **How can I be sure?**

The most common symptoms of cataract are typically affected by light. You may notice it becomes more difficult to see properly if the light is dim, like at dusk or dawn or inversely when the light is bright, like on a clear day or with artificial lighting.

### **Other Symptoms that indicate cataracts can include:**

- Colors looking less clear or more faded
- The acts of reading, watching TV and other daily activities become more strenuous than they used to be
- Discomfort and a dazzling sensation when faced with glare from bright lights

It normally takes years for the symptoms to develop, most commonly in the elderly. However, diabetics and short sighted people tend to develop it much earlier. Look out for sudden unpredictable variations in your ocular prescriptions.

## **Why do cataracts form?**

The lens is mostly made up of water and protein which is arranged in an exceedingly precise fashion that keeps the lens clear thus allowing light to pass through it. But as we get older, the protein tends to cluster together forming a cloudy area that covers the lens making it much harder to see.

It is still uncertain why cataracts form as we age. There is some speculation as to whether it may be linked to how fluids and nutrients reach the eye, too much exposure to ultraviolet rays or even diabetes.

Since a number of studies suggest cataract development is somehow connected to ultraviolet light, eye care practitioners recommend putting on sunglasses to reduce direct exposure to the potentially harmful rays.

## **Preparation for surgery**

The surgery is a day case. You are required to present a medical certificate that you are physically fit to undergo the surgery. Blood investigations and an ECG will also be taken if needed prior to your surgery date.

Two days prior the surgery you will be asked to use antibiotic eye drops 5 times a day to completely minimize the risk of post-operative infection.

You will be given the time that you need to be in the clinic. When you arrive, you will be escorted to the waiting area and a nurse will ask you some health related questions. Also your nurse will put some drops in your eyes to dilate your pupil. These drops might burn a little bit. Your surgeon will then come and talk to you and answer any further questions that you might have.

## **Eating, drinking and medications**

Your operation will be under local anesthetic and you can eat and drink as normal before and after the surgery. You should take your regular medication as you would normally. To reduce anxiety, you may be offered a sedative drug to help you relax during the procedure. **Please bring a list of your current medications with you.**

## Giving my consent

The surgeon performing your surgery will ask your permission to perform a particular treatment or investigation. You will be asked to sign a consent form that says you have agreed to the treatment and that you understand the benefits, risks and alternatives. If there is anything you don't understand or you need more time to think about it, please tell the staff caring for you. Remember, it is your decision. You can change your mind at any time, even if you have signed the consent form. Let the staff know immediately if you change your mind. Your wishes will be respected at all times.

## The surgery

Cataract surgery involved removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with an artificial lens. It is performed as a day surgery under local anesthesia, so you are awake, but your eye will not feel any pain. You will not be able to see properly during the surgery, but you may notice bright lights or colors. You will need to lie relatively still during the operation; if you need to cough or adjust your position, please warn your surgeon.

We will make small incision in the side of your eye and use ultrasound probes in a technique called 'phacoemulsification' to remove your cataract, and then replace it with an artificial lens. This is made of a special kind of material and stays in your eyes forever, only rarely needing replacement. Measurements taken before the operation help us decide which lens is best for you.

We offer different kinds of lenses, but this will be discussed with you by the surgeon to make sure that the result of the surgery meets your expectations.

Surgery is usually suture less and takes approximately 20 minutes.

## What are the risks?

Cataract surgery is usually very successful, with over 95 out of 100 noticing an improvement in their vision after the surgery if there are no other pre-existing eye conditions. However, it is important to realize that there is always a risk complications associated with any operation, some of the complications that may occur **during the operation** include:

- Internal bleeding
- Damage to other structures of the eye including the capsule surrounding the lens
- Incomplete removal of the cataract
- Part of the cataract falling into the back of the eye

Some of these complications can be dealt with at the time of the surgery or just after surgery.

Potential complications occurring **after the operation** include:

- Severe infection
- Fluid accumulating at the back of the eye (in the retina, the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye)
- Detachment of the retina
- Clouding of the membrane behind the lens

These complications can sometimes occur even if the operation itself is carried out perfectly. Many of these complications are manageable, although it may mean that other treatments may be required and the recovery period may be longer than usual. This may include the need for additional surgery. The most serious consequence of all the complications is the risk of loss of vision in extreme rare cases.

If the membrane behind the artificial lens becomes cloudy, this will make your vision blurry again. If this happens, laser treatment may be needed some time after the surgery, restoring back your clear vision.

We would like to remind you that these risks are not common and that all necessary precautions will be taken by our professional staff to ensure that you have an uneventful procedure.

### **Post- operative care**

Nowadays cataract surgery is quite straight forward and you can do most things immediately on the day after the surgery, however special precautions are recommended:

- Do not wash your hair for 1 week after the surgery
- Do not rub your eye for 1 week after the surgery
- Do not stay near pets for 1 week after the surgery
- Do not let any tap water come into your eye
- Do not stay in a dirty environment
- Always wash your hands before you put in the drops – see our hand washing guidelines
- Keep the drops in a clean place
- Wear sunglasses even inside for the 1st week after the surgery

You can:

- Watch the television
- Read
- Go to the cinema, theatre or museum
- Bend
- Cook

## **High Technology Implants (Multifocal and Toric Lenses)**

- Always give time for your eyesight to adjust
- Night driving may be challenging at first until you adjust, and haloes may be present for the first month
- Take extra caution when going down stairs or pavements

## **What should I do if I have a problem?**

Please contact us if there are any problems or any concerns. It is important to contact us if you have any of the following:

- Severe pain after the surgery
- Increasing redness, pain and blurring of the vision in the days or weeks after surgery
- Worsening vision – especially if you find that your vision initially improves after surgery but then starts to decline

## **Will I have a follow-up appointment?**

Yes. The timing of your next appointment depends on your surgeon, and is usually on the day after the surgery and then 4 -6 weeks later

## **Continuous care**

At Saint James Hospital, we are committed to your well- being before, during and after the surgery. Should any queries or difficulties arise, please feel free to contact us. We are always there for you, ready to help you.