

Get the Facts About Cataracts

More than half of Americans age 65 and older will experience cataracts, so many assume cataracts are just a sign of aging. However, children, young adults and even babies can have cataracts.

What Are Cataracts?

A cataract forms when the lens of the eye becomes cloudy. The lens is responsible for focusing light onto the retina. The reason for cloudiness could be due to protein changes in the lens. With nuclear cataracts, the most common kind of cataract, the inside of the lens is affected. In cortical cataracts, the outside of the lens is affected.

Cataracts grow quite slowly, meaning it can be years before they impact vision significantly. While they are often found in the elderly and progress as one ages, babies can be born with cataracts (known as congenital cataracts). Cataracts can be the result of steroid use. Also, younger adults can experience cataracts from a systemic illnesses, like diabetes. Cataracts may also form in smokers. Doctors say that not smoking can greatly reduce the risk for nuclear cataracts.

Research indicates that women are at a higher risk for cataracts than men. It could be because cataracts develop more pronounced as individuals age. Women generally live longer than men.

Cataract Symptoms

Symptoms of cataracts include blurred vision, dulled colors, appearance of halos around bright lights at night, and the need for brighter light when reading. Symptoms of cataracts cannot be remedied with reading glasses or other prescriptions.

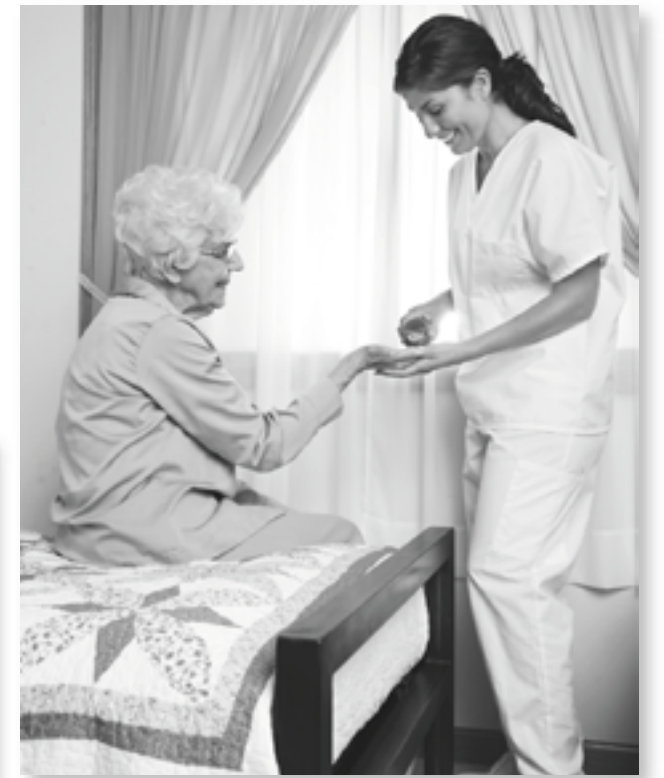
Treatment for Cataracts

The most common treatment for cataracts that cause considerable vision impairment is surgery. A cataract will be removed only if it interferes with vision enough to prevent a person from driving, reading, or doing other essential activities. A "ripe" cataract can be extracted by an eye surgeon in a routine surgery. If cataracts are present in both eyes, surgery will be performed one at a time.

The procedure is called phacoemulsification, or phaco. An eye surgeon will make a small incision into the side of the cornea. A probe is inserted where ultrasound waves will gradually break up the cloudy cataract. A suction then removes the pieces.

Recovery time varies among patients but could be a week or two. The eye will be covered with a protective wrap for a few days. Eye drops may have to be administered daily. Eventually protective sunglasses will block out bright light from the eye. One should also avoid activities that could affect the eye, such as dusty conditions, changing a litter box, bending over or doing heavy lifting, or splashing water in the eye.

Most outcomes of cataract surgery are successful. Vision is restored to at least 20/40, the acceptable level for driving. For those experiencing vision trouble, consult with an optometrist to determine if cataracts are the cause.



Get the Pharmacy Facts

Americans may be the most medicated people in the world, say statistics. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, half of all Americans take at least one prescription drug daily, while one in six take 3 or more. That means trips to the pharmacy are commonplace and individuals need to get the facts before they drop off their next prescription.

- Over-the-counter medications may be adequate. Oftentimes prescription drugs are just a higher dosage of an over-the-counter product. For example, a prescription-strength painkiller may be 500 mg, while an OTC pill is 200 mg. You may be able to simply take more of an OTC and save on prescription costs. Just check with the pharmacist for substitutions.

- Pharmacists know more about medications than your doctor. If you have a question about a medication, it is probably better to consult with your pharmacist. Your pharmacist has spent more time studying drugs than your doctor has and must hold a doctorate in pharmacy or a bachelor's degree in pharmacology if they received their degree prior to 2004.

- Talk to your pharmacist. The pharmacist is required by law to counsel his or her customers. If a pharmacist seems too busy to talk, take your business elsewhere. Also, it's wise to ask about prescriptions, considering half of the prescriptions taken in the U.S. are used improperly. Don't just rely on the medication print-out; ask in person to double-check that you're getting the right prescription.

- Some drugs get extra scrutiny. Prescriptions for pain killers as well as sleeping pills are often examined more carefully than other prescriptions. As a result, it's harder to be approved for extra refills, regardless of how much you think you need more.

- Handwriting woes. A doctor's handwriting is not just a mystery to the layperson. Sometimes pharmacists have trouble decoding the scribble, too. Electronic prescriptions can reduce errors, but few doctors use this method of prescribing medication.

- Speed up your time at the pharmacy. Monday and Tuesday evenings tend to be the busiest for pharmacies because people tend to drop off prescriptions over the weekend. Also, drive-through windows are convenient for customers, but not necessarily the pharmacist. They can get distracted, and that doesn't bode well when concentration is needed to properly fill your script.

- Not all generic drugs are the same. Generics can save money and are very close to original formulas. But subtle differences between different brands of generics and the original medication can cause different reactions in the body. For blood thinners and thyroid drugs, for instance, you may want to stick with the name brand.

Families can use this sample menu to create meals for an entire month.

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
FAMILY MENU							1 Make your own tacos (chicken or beef)
	2 Baked ziti Garlic bread	3 Barbecued chicken sandwiches Broccoli side dish	4 Fish and chips Garden salad Tartar sauce	5 Slow cooker chili French bread	6 Chicken Francaise Brown Rice	7 Homemade pizza and stromboli rolls	8 BBQ shish kabobs Corn on the cob
	9 Pot roast Potatoes and carrots	10 Pork chops Pineapple salsa Spring bean salad	11 Baked chicken cutlets Steak fries	12 Pasta with Seafood medley	13 BBQ ribs Baked beans Corn bread	14 Sloppy Joes Garden salad Potato chips	15 Beef stew Egg noodles
	16 Roasted chicken Steamed carrots Buttermilk biscuits	17 Chicken nuggets or fingers Potato Salad	18 Mac and cheese with ham chunks and broccoli	19 Fajitas Grilled Onions and peppers	20 Spaghetti marinara Meatballs	21 Cheesesteak sandwiches Cole slaw	22 BBQ chicken wings Caesar salad
	23/30 Vegetable lasagna Crescent rolls	24/31 Stuffed hamburgers Baked potatoes	25 Sweet and sour chicken White rice	26 Meatloaf w/ gravy Mashed potatoes Candied carrots	27 Chicken or lamb gyros Greek salad	28 Popcorn shrimp French fries	29 Flank steak Sweet potatoes Lima beans



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