

What are cataracts?

One of top causes of age-related vision loss is treatable

By David M. Archibald
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

As an optometrist, patients often express to me one of their greatest fears in life is to go blind. Fortunately for most of us, legal blindness will not happen in our life time. However, the majority of us will experience some decreased visual performance due to aging. As we age into the decade of the 60s and beyond, we will develop the eye condition called cataracts. In my experience, cataracts are one of the top two causes of vision loss related to aging.

What exactly is a cataract?

The human eye is born with a natural lens, positioned inside and directly behind the iris (the structure that we use to classify eyes being blue or brown). A cataract is a condition where the natural lens inside of the eye loses clarity. Cataracts can be defined as any abnormal opacity in the natural lens.

What does a cataract do to light transmission?

Cataracts cause light to become distorted, and it loses the potential to be properly focused. Many of us who have worn glasses or sunglasses have experienced poor vision when the lenses become smudged, dirty or damaged. Light will not transmit clearly through those damaged plastic or glass spectacle lenses. Natural lenses in eyes under age 50 are typically very clear, and transmit focused light very well. As we age, these natural lenses become more dense each year of our life. As the maturing occurs, the biology of the natural lens is affected. This biological change can result in the lenses becoming more cloudy,

opaque, developing yellow or brown pigment or even sometimes spots appear similar to a pair of dirty spectacle lenses. These developments for most people happen gradually. Some people will notice glare, difficulty with night driving, halos around lights or difficulty reading small print. However, due to the gradual, slow changes many people are unaware that they have cataracts.

What can be done about cataracts?

Luckily, we live in a time where cataract surgery is performed as an outpatient and routine surgical procedure. Modern cataract surgery is performed without general anesthesia and completed within 10-15 minutes. Patients generally report no significant pain or discomfort. They are awake during the surgery in order to assist in following the sur-

geon's directions. To aid with anxiety, most surgeons relax patients with medication to help them stay comfortable. As I visit with patients for post-op care, the majority express that the experience was much easier than anticipated and they usually look forward to having a second procedure on their other eye.

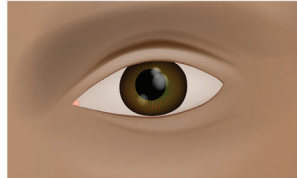
The natural lens of your eye performs the critical function of focusing light. Once the natural lens is removed, there is an artificial implant lens that will help focus light into the eye. Typically most people will have a change in glasses prescription as a result. Recovery from cataract surgery normally consists of using medication drops and protecting the eye from physical stress or trauma over three weeks. There are typically two or three post-op visits to ensure normal recovery and a new assessment for glasses

needs. Within just a few days, most patients have an obvious improvement in vision clarity. Many patients even report it the same day of surgery.

In Grant County, Blue Mountain Hospital contracts with a cataract surgeon to visit periodically and perform cataract surgery. Patients are then able to stay close to home, as they can have surgery at the hospital and all pre-op and post-op visits in John Day.

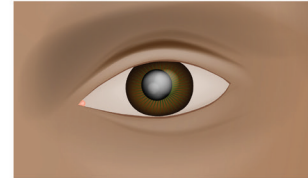
David M. Archibald, OD, is the optometrist at John Day Eye Care. If you have any questions about your eyes or think you may have cataracts, feel free to call John Day Eye Care at 541-575-1819 to schedule an eye exam. Medicare and other health insurance plans do cover eye care for eye disease such as cataracts. Further details regarding insurance coverage can be explained by calling the eye clinic.

Normal Eye

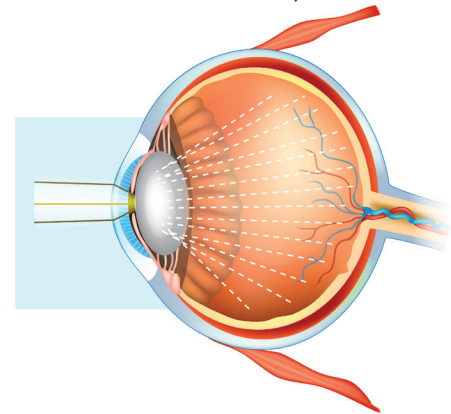
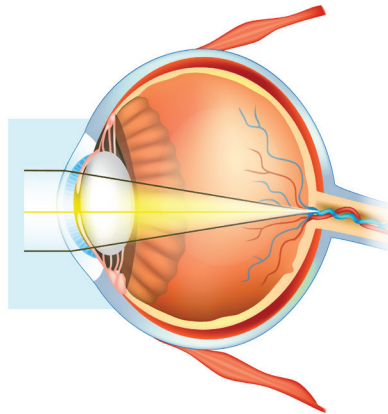


A healthy lens allows for all parts of the retina to receive the image

Cataract Eye



Clouding of the lens in the eye that affects vision. A cloudy lens scatters light, causing an image that's out of focus and hazy



A healthy eye on the left and an eye with cataracts on the right.

Getty Images