



Cataract Surgery

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What is a Cataract?

When the natural lens in the eye loses its clarity, it has a negative impact on vision. This phenomenon is known as **cataract formation** and eventually leads to treatable visual impairment.

How are Cataracts treated?

The natural lens is removed by means of a surgical intervention and replaced by an artificial lens of suitable power. The types of artificial lenses that are available, provide a variety of options for visual correction (i.e. single-, mono- and multifocal vision). Each type of visual correction has its unique characteristics.

Cataract operations are routinely performed under local anaesthetic. A general anaesthetic is only applied in very exceptional cases.

The surgical time is usually 20 to 30 minutes.

What are the advantages and risks?

1. Cataract surgery is one of the most common procedures within the medical field. It is widely applied and yields excellent results in suitable cases.
2. The primary incision to gain access to the cataract is very small (2.75mm) and created in such a way that it is self-sealing. Sutures are therefore not routinely required. Infection nevertheless still remains the major risk for this (and other intra-ocular) procedure, especially during the first three days after the operation. An uncontrolled infection may have catastrophic consequences. International statistics show that the general risk for infection is only about 0.025%, or about 1 in 4,000 cases.

3. The risk for infection is minimized by adopting the following approach:
 - Only one eye is operated at a time.
 - The operation is always performed in a sterile theatre environment.
 - Faithful and accurate after-care is mandatory.
 - The slightest potential signs of infection always receive immediate attention. Information about early suspicious symptoms, for which to be alert, will be provided.
4. Although the pre-operative lens measurements are done meticulously, the power calculation of the artificial lens may be slightly deficient due to the unique characteristics of each eye. A significant deviation can be corrected by spectacles, contact lenses, laser treatment or even a lens-exchange, but this is seldom required.
5. At the current state of technology, reading glasses are mandatory for nearby visual tasks after the surgery, should the lens calculation be set for distance vision.
6. There is a small risk (less than 1%) of retinal detachment, which can be corrected by appropriate surgery.
7. The artificial lens is placed onto a delicate membrane inside the eye to keep it in position. In about 15% of cases, scarring of the membrane may develop over time. This is easily treatable with a YAG laser three months or more after the operation.

What happens after the operation?

Upon discharge from the clinic, an after-care kit consisting of drops, tablets, eye pads, sticky tape and a hard eye shield is provided.

You need to start your medication on the day of the operation according to instructions you will receive at that time. Remember:

- Always wash your hands and clean your eye before placing drops into it.
- Rinse the eye with half an ampoule of the sterile water in your kit. Do not use anything else, like rooibos tea, salt water or Savlon! When these ampoules are finished and you still need to rinse the eye, use cooled water that was boiled for sterilizing beforehand.
- Use a new eye pad under the shield every time after cleaning.

Always use the eye drops according to the instructions on the bottle.

- Lean backwards and pull the bottom eye lid slightly downwards with one hand.
- Look up, place the drop in the little 'recess' that forms and then allow the eye lid to slip back in position.
- Close the eye lids, then turn the eyes left, right, up and down behind the closed lids, so that the medication may spread evenly.
- Wait for at least three minutes between consecutive drops.

Do not touch the tip of the bottle. The content may become contaminated, which may increase the risk for infection.

Diamox tablets are routinely prescribed, except in the presence of contra-indications. This medication often cause a variety of minor side-effects, which include a sensation of 'pins-and-needles' in the finger tips as well as around the mouth. It may also lead to a feeling of tiredness. Although these effects may be unpleasant, you are required to complete the medication. Should the side-effects be too severe, please call the clinic for an alternative.

The hard shield and eyepad should remain on the eye for the whole day of the operation. Only open and exchange it when you clean the eye. Upon your visit to the clinic the following day, you may leave the eye open during the day and use the hard shield only while sleeping. Always keep the shield in place with the provided Transpore plaster and do not use alternatives like rubber bands for this purpose.

If you receive ointment as part of your prescription, use the eye drops first and then the ointment.

If an antibiotic was prescribed, complete the full course.

You can use the eye normally, but do not stress it. If you experience any discomfort, stop working for a while and allow the eye to rest.

If the eye is uncomfortable or scratchy, use artificial tears, which are freely available from most pharmacies without prescription.

It is normal for your vision to fluctuate between sharp and blurry during the first two weeks.

Sometimes patients experience a red or pink hue during the first couple of days after the surgery. This does not indicate a bleed into the eye, but happens because of the optical properties of the new artificial lens versus those of the natural lens that was removed. The phenomenon is known as 'erythropsia', which literally means 'red vision'. It resolves spontaneously within the first week and will not return.

Do not under any circumstances...

- Rub your eyes.
- Allow dirty-, shampoo- or soapy water to enter the eye, especially during the first two weeks after surgery.

- Perform intense exercise during the first two weeks after the operation.
- Drive a motor vehicle if your vision is not clear and sharp.

Use the hard shield for one week to protect the eye at night. It is not necessary to wear a pad under the shield – use the shield only to protect the eye against accidental bumps or rubbing.

Whilst it is safe to wear your old spectacles, it might not correct your vision in the operated eye.

New spectacles are only indicated once the eye has fully healed. Allow four weeks before going for a spectacle test if applicable.

Contact your doctor URGENTLY if ...

- On day 1 after the procedure
 - Your eye becomes painful.
 - You develop nausea.
 - You develop a headache.
- Whenever you note increasing
 - Redness
 - Tearing
 - Discharge from the eye
 - Light sensitivity
 - Light flashes followed by visual loss
 - If your vision becomes increasing dull
 - If a 'black curtain' blocks your field of vision.

If you notice any of these or other symptoms, kindly call the Clinic at 012 333-1111.