



# Learn About Cataract Symptoms, Causes and Treatments

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## Learn About Cataract Symptoms, Causes and Treatments

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Imagine you are trying to take a picture on your phone of your daughter after you drop her off for her first year of college. Unfortunately, you touch the lens of your phone's camera, creating a smudge. When you look at your phone, the screen appears cloudy and blurry from the spots your fingers left behind, and you can't see the picture. Now, imagine seeing like that every day and not being able to clean the lens off to clear your vision. That's how [cataract](#) patients live every day.

## What is a Cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of the eye's natural lens behind the [iris](#) and the [pupil](#). It is the most common cause of vision loss in people over 40 years of age and the most common cause of blindness around the world. As the U.S. population ages, it is expected to affect more than 30 million Americans by the year 2020.

Naturally, the eye's lens bends, or refracts, rays of light and sends them into our retinas. Then, nerve signals are sent to the brain. The lens must be clear for the retina to receive a sharp image. However, cataract patients have a clouded lens, which translates into clouded vision.

There are three common types of cataracts, depending on which part of the eye is affected:

- **Nuclear** cataracts form in the central zone, or nucleus, of the eye – causing it to darken and change light from clear to yellow and sometimes brown.
- **Cortical cataracts** affect the layers surrounding the nucleus and resemble spokes as they begin in the peripheral part of the lens and move toward the center.
- **Posterior capsular or subcapsular cataracts** occur in the back of the lens and usually develop more rapidly.

Cataracts usually develop in both eyes, but may be worse in one or the other. Because protein builds up naturally over time, 90 percent of Americans will develop a cataract by age 65. Although not everyone will have their vision affected significantly, it is important to see your eye doctor regularly to ensure they do not cause a disruption to your daily life.

## What are Symptoms and Signs of a Cataract?

Cataracts start out small with very little symptoms initially. Patients may notice that their vision is blurred slightly, like looking through a cloudy window. Additionally, light from the sun, lamps or headlights may cause more glare and/or sensitivity than previously. Colors also become less bright and duller than before. Other common symptoms include nearsightedness and trouble with contacts or corrective eyewear not working as well. Posterior capsular or subcapsular cataracts may not have any early symptoms, while nuclear cataracts are generally more noticeable in the early stages. The type of cataract can affect how rapidly cataracts develop and how early on the symptoms may arise. It is

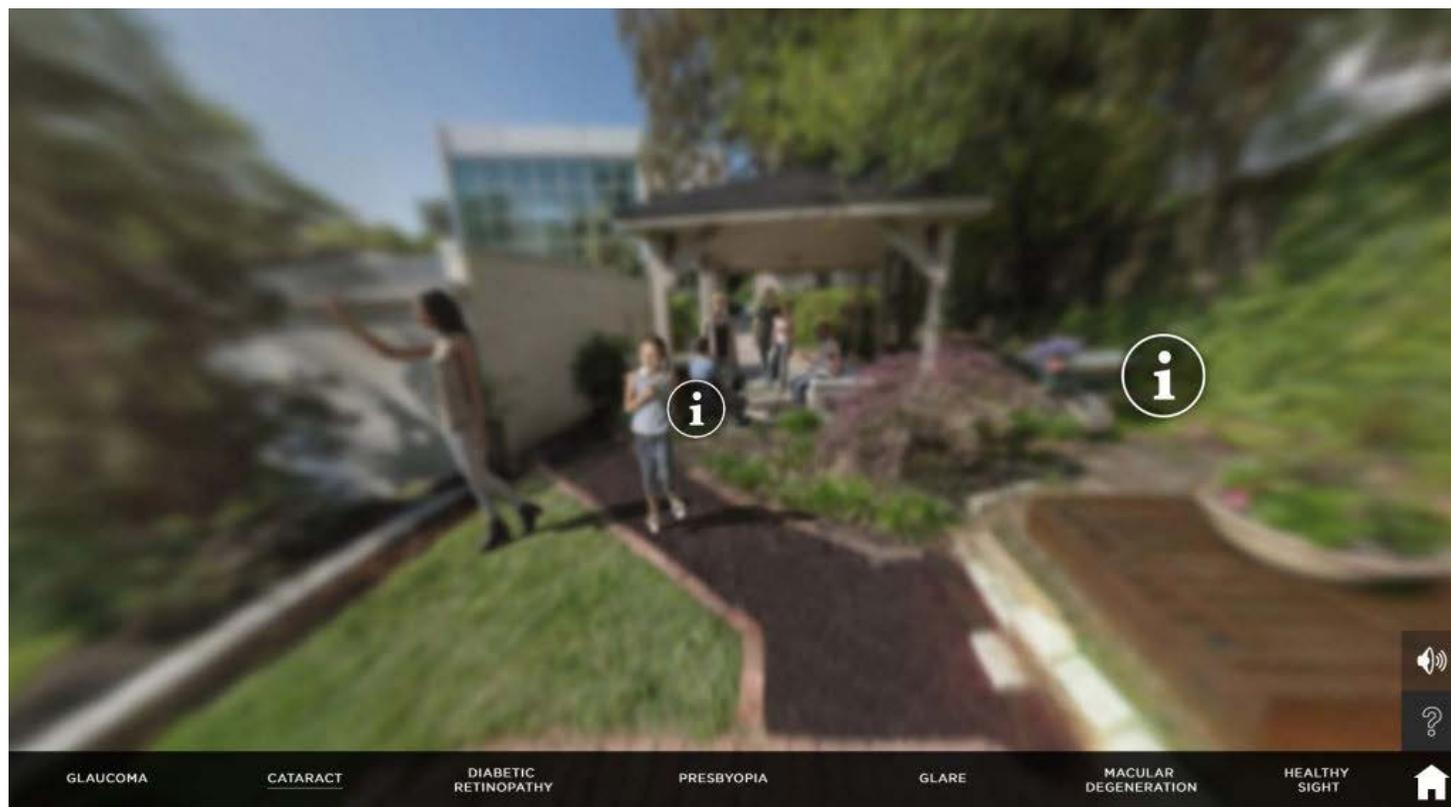
important to see your eye doctor for an exam if you think you have a cataract.

## What Causes a Cataract?

The eye's lens is made up of mostly protein and water. As we get older, the protein starts to clump together and can cloud an area of the lens. Over time, the area can grow larger, making it more difficult to see.

While cataracts are usually age-related, there are many other factors that make lead to a higher risk for developing cataracts. The risk of developing cataracts is heightened by other medical conditions, most notably diabetes. They can also result from cigarette smoke, alcohol abuse, UV from the sun and artificial sources, radiation or prolonged use of corticosteroid or diuretic medications. In some less common cases, cataracts are present at birth or can develop in childhood.

While it is unclear whether or not cataracts can be prevented, studies have shown there are possible ways to lessen the risk of developing a cataract. For example, nutritional supplements including vitamin E, carotenoids, lutein and zeaxanthin have been linked to a decrease in risk for cataracts. Additionally, vitamin C and foods containing omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of developing the disease.



## What is it like to See Through Eyes of Someone with a Cataract?

While it's not difficult to imagine the effects of a cataract, they can only be truly understood after seeing

through the eyes of someone who has one. Whose faces would you miss seeing? How would dulled colors affect your everyday life? See the impact of living with cataracts for yourself using the Vision Loss Simulator: [davisvision.com/visionloss](http://davisvision.com/visionloss).

## How is a Cataract Diagnosed?

A comprehensive eye exam from your eye doctor is the only way to diagnose a cataract. Your eye doctor will test how well you can see and examine the lens and other parts of your eye. Regular yearly eye exams are the best to diagnose and treat cataracts before the symptoms become extreme.

## How Do You Treat a Cataract?

Upon early symptoms of a cataract, your eye doctor will provide a prescription for corrective eyewear. However, if symptoms worsen enough to affect your daily life, you may want to think about cataract surgery. Cataract surgery is a common surgery, with more than three million Americans receiving it each year. It is the most frequently performed surgery in the U.S. Cataract surgery is extremely common and effective. In fact, nine out of every 10 people who have the procedure regain vision between 20/20 and 20/40.

During the outpatient surgery, the surgeon will break up the lens, then safely remove and replace it with a clear, artificial intraocular lens. These lenses are constantly being improved to make the surgery easier for surgeons and more helpful for patients.

After the surgery, cataract patients usually require reading glasses or progressive lenses to correct [presbyopia](#). For even better vision, ask your eye doctor about eyeglasses with an anti-reflective coating or Transitions<sup>®</sup> lenses. Anti-reflective coatings can help reduce the amount of glare from the sun and artificial light sources, like headlights or lamps. *Transitions* lenses adapt their level of tint to changing light conditions, so your eyes don't have to. This gives your eyes a break and can help with the light sensitivity that comes with having cataracts.

Treat your sight like the gift that it is and make sure to get your eyes checked regularly.

## Sources:

- All About Vision. [Cataract](#).
- American Academy of Ophthalmology. [What are cataracts?](#)
- American Optometric Association. [Cataract](#).
- Cleveland Clinic.
- National Eye Institute. [Facts about Cataracts](#).

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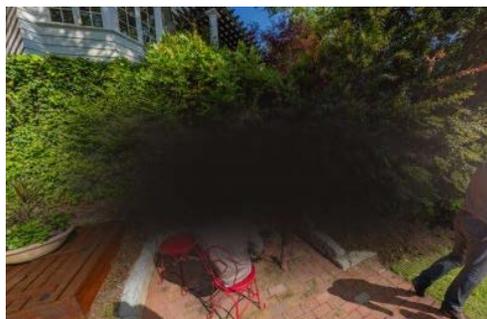
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