

Cataracts: a treatable cause of visual impairment

Cataracts are the leading cause of treatable blindness worldwide and remain an important cause of visual impairment in the United States. As the “baby boomer” generation hits retirement age, the prevalence of visually significant cataracts will continue to rise. The Eye Disease Prevalence Research Group estimates that the number of individuals with cataracts will increase by 50% by 2020. Last year, more than 3 million cataract surgeries were performed in the United States alone, with over 800 performed locally in Montrose and Delta.

What is a cataract?

A cataract is degradation and clouding of the crystalline lens inside the eye. The lens is located behind the pupil and colored iris. Light rays pass through the lens, which then focuses the light onto the retina. While young, the lens in our eye is clear and soft. As we age, a gradual compression of lens fibers and change in protein structure causes the lens to cloud and harden. Eventually, this leads to symptoms such as glare, blurry vision, and decrease in color vision.

Can cataracts be prevented?

Eye drops and vitamin supplements have not been proven to slow cataract formation. However, there are a number of risk factors that you can control to decrease your risk of early cataract formation. Limit your exposure to UV light by wearing sunglasses when outdoors. Don't smoke tobacco, and eat a well balanced diet. Avoid the complications associated with diabetes, and if possible, avoid long term corticosteroid use. Eye injuries can also cause the formation of traumatic cataracts so wear your safety glasses.

How are cataracts treated?

In the early stages, the effects of cataracts can sometimes be managed with a change in your eyeglass prescription. Once the cataract affects vision significantly, it can be removed with outpatient surgery. Cataract surgery has advanced tremendously in recent years, and is now one of the most common and successful surgeries performed. With surgery, the cataract is removed using high frequency ultrasound energy and an artificial lens is implanted to replace the clouded lens. The intraocular lens implant (or IOL) helps to clearly focus the light images onto your retina. A variety of implant options exist that may decrease your dependency on eyeglasses after your surgery.

For more information on cataracts and cataract surgery visit www.montroseeyes.com

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