



Information about cataract surgery

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1. Cataract surgery

Your surgeon has recommended a cataract operation. It is important that you understand the information in this leaflet before you decide to proceed with surgery.

This leaflet gives you information about the risks and benefits of cataract surgery and what the aftercare entails. The decision is yours as to whether to proceed with an operation or not. If you have any questions you may also wish to discuss them with a qualified member of staff, or with a relative or carer.

The cataract

The eye surgeon has recommended cataract surgery because the lens in your eye has become cloudy making it difficult for you to see. Cataracts can be caused by age, injuries, diseases such as diabetes, prolonged inflammation within the eye or they may be hereditary.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

New glasses may improve your vision to some extent on a temporary basis, however if the cataract is too advanced, glasses will not help. In this case surgery is the only option to restore your vision.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

The decision as to whether to proceed with cataract surgery or not is yours. However, a cataract usually slowly gets worse. Leaving a cataract untreated does threaten your vision. It will become worse and more blurred until you have very little vision left.

2. Day of surgery

The operation will be performed at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, Area 1, Level 0.

You should have a responsible adult to come with you as an escort. You may come in using public transport, but you must go home in a car or taxi.

If your operation is in the morning, you may have breakfast. If it is in the afternoon, you may have lunch.

Take all your medication as normal unless instructed otherwise.

Please wear loose comfortable clothing as you will be able to keep your clothes on during the operation. Leave all jewellery at home and do not wear make up or nail varnish.

After your operation you are usually able to go home within a few hours.

You may be sent home with an eye pad and clear plastic shield on your eye, or just the clear plastic shield on its own.

Your post-operative eye drops and instructions will be given to you before you leave the hospital.

The anaesthetic

On arrival to the department, the nurses will put in eye drops to the eye you are having operated on. These will enlarge the pupil and make your vision very blurred.

Just before the operation you will be given an anaesthetic to numb the eye. The procedure is performed under local anaesthetic which means you

will be awake during the operation but the eye will be numb. This may consist of simply eye drops or injecting local anaesthetic solution into the tissue surrounding the eye. This will be discussed with you prior to the operation by the medical staff performing the operation.

3. The operation

An experienced eye surgeon will carry out the operation or may supervise a doctor in training. The purpose of the operation is to replace the cloudy lens (**cataract**), with a clear plastic lens (**implant lens**), inside your eye using a local anaesthetic. The operation takes approximately 20 minutes but may take up to 45 minutes.

In the operating theatre you will be asked to lie on the theatre table. You will have a special pillow but you will need to lie as flat as possible. We cannot give you an extra pillow but the theatre table is adjustable so we may be able to raise the head of the table slightly. We will do everything possible to make you comfortable.

The skin around your eye will be cleaned using an antiseptic solution. A sterile drape (cover) is placed over your eye. It will be lifted off your nose and mouth so you will be able to breathe normally. The surgeon makes a very small cut in the eye, softens the lens with ultrasound (sound waves) and removes it through a small tube. A thin bag, (the lens capsule), in which the lens sat, is left behind. An implant lens is then inserted into the bag to replace the cataract. Sometimes a small

stitch is put into the eye to help seal the wound. At the end of the operation, an eye pad and/or plastic shield may be put over your eye to protect it.

4. After the operation

If you have any discomfort, we suggest that you take a pain reliever such as paracetamol. It is normal to feel itching and mild discomfort for a while after cataract surgery. In addition your vision may remain somewhat blurred for the initial period after surgery. Some fluid discharge is common.

After 1-2 days mild discomfort should disappear. In most cases, healing will take about 2-6 weeks after which new glasses (if necessary) can be prescribed by your optician. Please ask the clinic doctor for advice before seeing your optician.

You will be given eye drops to reduce inflammation and help prevent infection. The hospital staff will explain how and when to use them. You must adhere strictly to the instructions given.

Certain symptoms following surgery could mean that you require prompt treatment. Please contact the hospital immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Excessive pain
- Loss of vision
- Increasing redness of the eye

5. Following cataract surgery

After the operation you may read or watch TV almost straight away, but initially your vision may be blurred due to the dilating drops given prior to the operation. The healing eye needs time to adjust so that it can focus properly with the other eye, especially if the other eye has a cataract. However if you have another condition such as diabetes, glaucoma or age related macular degeneration your quality of vision may still be limited even after successful surgery. Remember that the vast majority of patients have improved eyesight following cataract surgery.

6. Benefits and risks of cataract surgery

The most obvious benefits are greater clarity of vision and improved colour vision. This is because lens implants are selected to compensate for existing focusing problems. Most people find that their eyesight improves considerably after surgery but glasses may still be needed especially for reading. You will be advised when to visit your optician after your post operative clinic visit.

You should be aware that there is a small risk of complications either during or after the operation.

7. Some possible complications during the operation

- Tearing of the back part of the lens capsule with disturbance of the gel inside the eye that may sometimes result in reduced vision
- Loss of all or part of the cataract into the back of the eye requiring a further operation which may require a general anaesthetic (risk 1:100)
- Bleeding inside the eye (risk 1:1000)
- Bruising of the eye or eyelids
- Abrasion (scratch) of the cornea (the front surface of the eye) which can be painful but settles quickly
- High pressure inside the eye which is temporary
- Clouding of the cornea
- Incorrect strength or dislocation of the implant
- Swelling of the retina (macular oedema)
- Detached retina, which could lead to loss of sight. This is rare
- Infection of the eye (endophthalmitis) which can lead to loss of sight or even the eye (risk 1:1000)
- Allergy to medication used

There is also a risk of Posterior capsule opacification. This is common and may present gradually, months or years after surgery. When this happens, the back part of the lens capsule, which was left in the eye to support the implant lens, becomes cloudy and your sight becomes blurred again. To treat this, the eye

specialist uses a laser beam to make a small opening in the cloudy membrane in order to improve the eyesight. This is a painless outpatients procedure which normally only takes a few minutes.

Complications are rare (and in most cases can be treated effectively). In a small proportion of cases, further surgery may be needed. Very rarely some complications can result in blindness.

8. Your questions answered

How long will I be in hospital?

You need to allow approximately 4 hours for your stay in the theatre suite.

What will I need to bring with me?

Your inhalers, angina spray/tablets and your insulin (if applicable). The unit staff will provide drinks and biscuits.

Will I be safe at home?

Yes, if you have been managing alone before the operation. You may have an eye pad/shield covering your eye the night of your operation. Care must be taken especially on stairs.

Can I read and watch the television?

Yes you can read and watch the television as soon as you feel comfortable.

Can I wash my hair?

Yes it is safe to have a shower, or bath and wash your

hair, as long as you protect your eye from getting shampoo/shower gel into it.

When can I have new glasses?

The clinic doctor will advise you when to have your eyes tested for new glasses at your usual optician. This is normally between 4-6 weeks after the operation.

Am I allowed to drive?

No, you are advised **NOT** to drive until advised by the medical staff. This is usually after your first post operative clinic visit when the medical staff are able to tell you if your vision is to the required standard.

Can I travel on public transport?

Yes, you can travel on public transport after one week.

When can I go back to work?

Returning to work will depend on your occupation. Please discuss this with the clinic doctor at your post-operative clinic visit.

Can I go on holiday?

Yes, if your eye is satisfactory after your first post-operative clinic visit. Flights are allowed, but you are advised to discuss specific plans with the clinic doctor.

Can I go swimming?

You may go swimming approximately six weeks after surgery. Again, ask the clinic doctor at your post operative visit.

We hope this information is sufficient to help you decide whether to go ahead with cataract surgery.

Please write down any further questions that you may have so that you can ask the doctor or nurse when you come into hospital for your appointment. Our staff will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Acknowledgments: The Royal College of Ophthalmologists Cataract Surgery Guidelines.

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