allaboutEyes
OPTOMETRY — EYE CARE AND EYE HEALTH

Cataracts block light

In a healthy eye, light passes through the cornea and the pupil to the lens, which focuses the light, producing clear, sharp images on the retina at the back of the eye. A cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens. As a cataract develops it scatters light, which prevents a sharply defined image from reaching the retina.

At first, the cloudiness may affect only a small part of the lens and may not be noticed but over time the cataract grows larger.

When a cataract reaches the stage where it significantly scatters or blocks light, vision becomes impaired and cataract surgery is usually recommended to restore vision. The surgeon will remove the clouded lens and in most cases replace it with a clear, plastic intraocular lens.

Clouded vision can make it more difficult to do everyday activities such as read, drive a car or see the expression on a friend's face. Looking through a cloudy lens is like trying to see through a fogged-up window. Cataracts can affect distance and near vision and cause other problems such as glare and halos around lights.

Normal vision

Simulated vision through a cataract

Ageing is the most common cause of cataract. Ageing causes the lenses in our eyes to become less flexible, less transparent and thicker. The lens is made mostly of water and protein fibres and with ageing, the structure of the protein fibres breaks down. Some of the fibres begin to clump together, clouding small areas of the lens.

Other risk factors for developing cataract include diabetes, smoking or excessive exposure to cigarette smoke, eye injury or inflammation, eye surgery, exposure to UV light and a family history of cataracts.

Your optometrist can detect cataract. The most common treatment is referral to an eye surgeon to remove cataract.

YOUR OPTOMETRIST

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