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What to Expect after Cataract Surgery

Common Symptoms during Recovery:

- The day after cataract surgery, the pupil may be dilated. This is normal and may cause some light sensitivity and blur. The pupil usually will return to a more normal appearance within 48-72 hours after surgery. In some cases the appearance of the pupil may change after cataract surgery.
- It is normal to be more sensitive to light after cataract surgery. Some of this will fade but the world will also seem brighter because the cataract is no longer filtering light that enters the eye. This will allow you to see better in dim lighting but will also make you more sensitive to daylight that may not have seemed bright before surgery. We will provide you with a pair of sunglasses for your comfort. You may wear these as needed, it is not required for normal healing
- It is normal for there to be swelling of the cornea after cataract surgery. This may cause the vision to be somewhat blurry. The swelling can sometimes clear rapidly, other times it clears more slowly.
- You may experience watery eyes and eye or eyelid redness during the first few days or weeks following your surgery. This is generally mild and not unusual.
- It is common for small blood vessels in the white of your eye or eyelid to leak slightly during surgery, especially for people who take blood thinners. This may cause a subconjunctival hemorrhage and result in a red area on the white part of the eye. The subconjunctival hemorrhage may look alarming, but is harmless and has no effect on your vision. A bruise may also appear on the eyelid which is also normal and does not affect the vision. Do not worry; if present, these will slowly clear away within two to six weeks.
- During cataract surgery small incisions are made in the eye. Like any healing incision in the body, these incisions can be sensitive after surgery and may result in a foreign body sensation for weeks or months. Most people describe this sensation as mild and using artificial tears will usually help the eyes feel more comfortable if needed.
- It is normal for the eyes to feel dry following cataract surgery. This dryness may last for a few days or even a few months after surgery. Using artificial tears will help the eyes feel more comfortable (ask us if you would like a list of recommended products.) If your eyes feel dry it may also be helpful to use flax seed oil and/or fish oil nutritional supplements. Although cataract surgery does not cause long term dry eye, the eye may be more sensitive after the operation and as a result may be more uncomfortable from the same amount of dryness that was present before the operation.
- The optics of the intraocular lens (IOL) implanted at the time of cataract surgery are excellent but are somewhat different from the human lens (cataract) that is being replaced. Some people notice an arc of light, or a shadow, in the side of their vision after cataract surgery. This is usually a reflection from the intraocular lens (IOL) that is implanted during surgery. Some people will notice some halo or glare from the IOL. If present, most people describe these optical reflections as fading over time and most people feel that these optical side effects are very minor in comparison to the visual consequences of a cataract.



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Please discuss your experiences with the doctor because it is important to distinguish optical reflections from vitreous and retinal changes that may cause floaters and/or flashing lights. These may be a sign of a retinal condition that needs immediate attention.

- The Prednisolone eye drops can leave a white residue along the lash line or in the corner of the eye. If this is bothersome, you can gently remove the debris with a clean washcloth soaked in warm water. Take care not to get any water in the eye.
- During the preoperative consultation, detailed measurements are taken of the eye. These measurements are used to help the doctor select the IOL power. Your doctor will discuss the options with you and select the lens that is most appropriate for your lifestyle and goals after surgery. In many instances there is some residual refractive error following cataract surgery (e.g. blur that is correctable with glasses). This is because the IOL heals into a position that is not entirely predictable in advance, even with perfectly performed cataract surgery and highly advanced preoperative measurements and calculations.
- To achieve your best vision after cataract surgery, you may need glasses or contact lenses. You may update your glasses about one month after surgery. If you are having surgery in both eyes, wait one month after surgery in the second eye to update your glasses.
- Before you get updated glasses, there may be a significant discrepancy between your old glasses and the new glasses prescription that you will get after surgery. Some patients decide to wear their old glasses, knowing that the vision may be blurry in the eye that just had surgery. Others remove the glasses lens from the frame in the glasses over the operative eye, or replace that lens with a plain lens with no prescription. Some patients feel comfortable not wearing glasses for distance and use over the counter reading glasses. Do whatever works best for you. It does not influence the healing process; it is simply a matter of determining how to keep your vision working for you while waiting to get new glasses. If you have specific questions, ask your eye doctor what strategy is likely to work best for you.
- Cataracts do not come back but some patients develop a “secondary cataract” after surgery which can blur the vision or cause glare or halos around lights weeks or even years after cataract surgery. A secondary cataract is not a complication, tumor or growth and does not require repeating cataract surgery. Instead it is a clouding of the capsule that supports the intraocular lens and can be treated with a simple laser procedure in the office. A secondary cataract can be diagnosed during a routine dilated eye exam.
- It is important to be evaluated whenever you feel your eye is not healing appropriately. It is normal for the eye to feel scratchy after surgery. It is not normal for you to experience pain or a sudden decrease in vision. If you experience these symptoms, please contact your eye doctor.

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