

Cataract Direct Referral Service

Patient Information

I have been told that I have cataracts, won't stronger glasses help?

At this visit to your Optometrist it was found that you had signs of cataract. Your Optometrist will have discussed this with you, how this may be affecting your sight and how this may interfere with everyday tasks. Even with glasses, cataracts can cause difficulty seeing distant objects clearly; television subtitles, people's faces and road signs may not be easy to make out. Close work may be blurry and difficult to read for any length of time. Bright sunlight and headlights at night may cause glare. Cataracts can cause the strength of the eye to change, sometimes quite quickly.

New glasses may focus the image onto the back of the eye slightly better than your existing pairs, but cataract will act like a smudgy filter so that the images always look blurry.

What is cataract?

Inside your eye is a lens which is usually clear; as part of the natural ageing of the eye this gradually becomes misty. Usually this happens in both eyes but one eye may develop cataract quicker than the other. Smoking and exposure to sunlight have been linked to increasing the formation of cataracts. Some medical conditions, such as diabetes, some medications and injury to the eye can make cataracts develop more quickly.

If I choose to have cataract surgery, what happens next?

Your Optometrist has assessed the level of your cataract, according to the guidelines of the Gloucestershire Cataract Direct Referral Service, and found that it is appropriate to refer you to an eye clinic. They will ask you which hospital you would like to be sent to. Your Optometrist will send the referral forms to the hospital. Your doctor will also receive a copy. You will be sent an appointment for your first visit to the eye clinic; the ophthalmologist's team will also assess your cataract, take the measurements needed for the surgery and discuss any possible risks. Cataract surgery has a very high success rate. The hospital should be able to give an approximate waiting time for the surgery to be carried out.

Most cataract surgery is carried out under local anaesthetic; the cloudy lens is removed and replaced with a clear plastic one. Although you will be awake, the surgeon will make sure you do not feel the operation which is very short, usually only around 15 minutes. You will not normally need any stitches, and will be allowed home the same day, but it is better if someone can be with you for the first 24 hours after the surgery.

Can I prevent cataracts?

The only definite way to get rid of cataracts is by surgery. There is no scientific proof to suggest any other remedies can prevent or treat cataract. You cannot make your cataracts worse by using your eyes too much.

Do I have to have surgery?

If your level of vision can be improved so that you feel you can cope with your daily tasks, it is usually safe to leave the cataract in the eye. It is sometimes more difficult to remove the cataract if you wait too long.

Can I still drive?

If you still meet the standards of vision for driving as required by the DVLA then you may continue to drive while you are waiting for your surgery.

What do I have to do after the surgery?

You will be given eye drops to use for the first few weeks after the surgery. You should be able to carry out normal activities after only 24 hours or so, but avoid heavy lifting, strenuous exercise, swimming and be careful to avoid getting soapy water in the eyes. Your vision should return to a reasonable level within a few days, though your glasses prescription may have completely changed. You should wait 4 weeks (and wait until you have finished your drops) after the surgery to have your eyes examined and new spectacles made. Your surgeon will be able to advise you whether it is safe to drive before you have new spectacles made. If your eyes do not settle down contact the eye clinic for advice.

Will both cataracts be removed?

Only one eye will be operated on at one time. If the cataract has developed enough in the other eye, the surgeon may put your name on the waiting list for this eye also to have surgery. If the cataract has not developed enough, you should continue to have your regular examinations with your Optometrist who will refer you back to the hospital when it deteriorates sufficiently to do so.

Can the cataract come back?

No. However, part of the sac that contained the original cataract can become cloudy. This can be removed by a simple, painless procedure using a laser. This takes only a few minutes. Your Optometrist will detect when this is happening at your routine eye examinations and refer you back to the eye clinic if necessary.

About your records

Primary Eyecare Gloucestershire collects the details of the Optometrists' referrals and keeps the record of them secure on a web based system. If you are referred to other health professionals, these details may be shared with them to ensure you receive the best care. Some information is also used to check how the service to the patient is working, make improvements and administer finances.

Personal details are not shared with any other groups or individuals.

If you do not wish Primary Eyecare Gloucestershire to hold and use your details in this way, please tell the Optometrist who will arrange for the details to be arranged for the details to be removed from the computer system.

Patient Satisfaction

We would like to hear of your experience with this service. Therefore, we would be most grateful if you would complete the short survey that the Optometrist will give you. Your feedback is valuable and will help us continually monitor and develop the service.