



Cataracts

Janet M. Torpy; Cassio Lynm; Richard M. Glass

Online article and related content
current as of November 23, 2009.

JAMA. 2003;290(2):286 (doi:10.1001/jama.290.2.286)

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/290/2/286>

Supplementary material

Spanish PDF

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/290/2/286/DC1>

Correction

[Contact me if this article is corrected.](#)

Citations

[Contact me when this article is cited.](#)

Topic collections

Ophthalmology; Ophthalmological Disorders; Cataracts/ Lens; JAMA Patient Page

[Contact me when new articles are published in these topic areas.](#)

Related Articles published in
the same issue

Recent Advances and Future Frontiers in Treating Age-Related
Cataracts

[Renée Solomon et al. *JAMA*. 2003;290\(2\):248.](#)

Subscribe

<http://jama.com/subscribe>

Email Alerts

<http://jamaarchives.com/alerts>

Permissions

permissions@ama-assn.org

<http://pubs.ama-assn.org/misc/permissions.dtl>

Reprints/E-prints

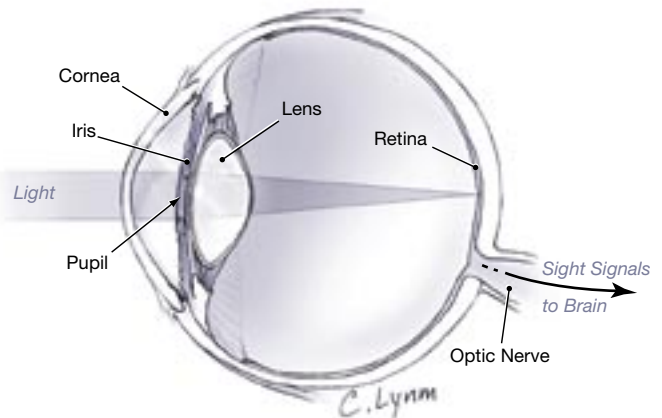
reprints@ama-assn.org

Cataracts

As part of our **visual** (sight) system, each eye contains a lens. The **lens** is a clear, disc-shaped structure behind the **pupil** and **iris**. The lens focuses light beams on the **retina**, the back part of the eye that sends sight signals to the brain. When the lens becomes cloudy, vision blurs. Clouding of the lens is called a **cataract**.

Cataracts are common, especially in older individuals. As a normal part of the aging process, the lens gradually becomes cloudy. A simple eye examination by an **ophthalmologist** (eye physician) can detect a cataract. The July 9, 2003, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about cataracts.

Cross Section of the Eye



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CATARACTS

- Blurry or dim vision
- Trouble seeing at night
- Needing brighter light to read
- Seeing halos around objects or lights
- Sensitivity to glare
- Rapid changes in eyewear prescriptions

Cataracts are not painful. They do not cause itching, redness, or discharge from the eye.

RISK FACTORS FOR CATARACTS

- Age
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Exposure to sunlight
- Alcohol use
- Previous eye injury
- Premature birth
- Corticosteroid medications

CATARACT SURGERY

Cataracts should be removed when they interfere with vision for everyday activities. Cataract surgery is common. More than 1.5 million cataract surgeries are performed in the United States each year. The success rate for cataract surgery is about 98%.

There are several types of cataract surgery, but all remove most of the clouded lens. Sometimes local anesthetic drops are used to numb the eye for the operation. For some individuals, injections are given to make the eye painless and not able to move during the surgery. Sedating medications may be given during the procedure, but they may not be required in all cases. For many patients, the clouded lens is replaced by a clear artificial lens inside the eye. Other patients may need a contact lens or special glasses after the operation. Your ophthalmologist will describe the techniques used for your particular case.

Recovering from a cataract operation is usually simple, but you will be asked to follow some instructions, such as not lifting heavy objects or bending from the waist. Talk with your ophthalmologist about your personal risks and benefits from cataract surgery.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Eye Institute
301/496-5248
www.nei.nih.gov
- American Academy of Ophthalmology
415/561-8500
www.aao.org
- American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
703/591-2220
www.ascrs.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on age-related macular degeneration was published in the November 13, 2002, issue.

Sources: American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, National Eye Institute

Janet M. Torpy, MD, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other print or online reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 718/946-7424.

