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Ophthalmologist – Specializing in Cataract Surgery, Corneal Disease and Uveitis

Cataracts in Adults with Otherwise Healthy Eyes

What is a cataract? A healthy lens is clear and is located behind the iris – the coloured part of the eye. The lens focuses light as it passes to the retina. A cataract occurs when the lens becomes cloudy.

What are the symptoms of cataracts? Cloudy, blurry, fuzzy or foggy vision; poor night vision and problems driving at night; changes in the way you see colors; double vision or ghosting; problems with glare, halos; frequent changes in glasses prescription; need for more light when reading.

How does your eye doctor know if you have cataracts? A regular eye exam will detect a cataract. The dilation drops administered at the time of your office visit enables the doctor to see inside the eye. Dilation may “blur” your vision but in all patients, the pupil does return to its normal size.

Is cataract surgery right for me? With cataract surgery, we hope to regain the vision lost due to the cataract. The benefits to you in improving your vision are: independence, confidence, safety and enjoyment while pursuing activities such as driving, reading, hobbies, working and social activities. Surgery is recommended when the cataract appears to be the cause of the reduced vision and only when it is preventing you from functioning as you normally would. It is Dr. Chan’s opinion that you could benefit by having cataract surgery. Since the operation is considered elective, the decision has been left to you. Cataract surgery is considered major eye surgery, but complications are rare. Statistically, 95% of patients have no complications. Around 4% have minor complications that resolve on their own without treatment. Less than 1% have significant complications that require further treatment such as a high intraocular pressure, infection inside the eye, dislocation of the implanted lens, drooping eyelid, retinal detachment, swelling or clouding of the cornea and the remote possibility of permanent loss of vision in the eye.

What should I know about cataract surgery? Your operation will be done as an outpatient at the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Typically, patients spend around 3 hours at the hospital, as you are required to arrive 2 hours ahead of your surgery time to be prepared. The actual surgery time usually takes 10 to 15 minutes. You will not be able to drive yourself home after surgery or to the follow-up examination the following morning.

Freezing of the eye is usually done using eye drops and gel (topical anesthesia) but may be done using a freezing needle (retrobulbar anesthesia) if Dr. Chan feels that you would not be able to keep your eyes still enough to perform the surgery. An anesthetist is on hand to administer the freezing and provide intravenous medications that help you relax and remain comfortable during the procedure. With topical anesthesia, you will be required to keep the eye still during surgery and to follow instructions. With retrobulbar anesthesia, the eye is immobilized which may cause double vision for 4 to 12 hours so a patch is placed over the operated eye before you leave the hospital. You remove the patch at home the next morning. In all cases, you are awake during surgery and we ask that you refrain from sudden head or eye movements.

Your cataract will be removed using a procedure called phacoemulsification, whereby ultrasonic (sound) waves break down the cataract allowing Dr. Chan to remove it through an incision 2.75 mm in size. The lens capsule is left behind. An intraocular lens, made of a soft injectable acrylic material, is implanted within the capsule through the micro-incision, and generally no sutures are used.

What care is required following surgery? You are required to use eye drops for 4 weeks following surgery, and may resume your drops 4 hours after surgery unless otherwise specified. You are also asked to wear an eye shield at bedtime for 1 week so that you do not inadvertently rub your eye while asleep. You should wear either a pair of sunglasses or your old glasses during the daytime for the first week so that you do not rub the eye, and also to prevent dirt or dust from entering the eye. For the first week after surgery, do not lift more than 20-30 lbs, avoid bending over as much as possible, do not strain yourself physically, and be careful not to get anything in the eye. Two weeks after surgery, you may return to your regular activities.

You will see Dr. Chan the morning after the day of surgery, and 2-3 weeks afterwards to ensure that the eye is healing properly. You may experience some mild discomfort or irritation for several days and this is normal. If you have cataracts in both eyes, you may experience visual distortion following your first surgery. The distortion may persist until the second eye is done. After cataract surgery, your prescription for glasses will likely be changed. It is recommended that you see your regular optometrist 6 weeks after surgery for a final follow-up examination and to obtain an updated prescription if needed.

The nurses at the hospital will review the postoperative instructions with you.

What should I tell my eye doctor before surgery? Bring your medications and pill bottles with you to the hospital the day of your surgery. If you cannot lie on your back quietly and comfortably for 30 to 60 minutes, be sure to tell the nurses when you arrive.

How much will it cost to have cataract surgery? Alberta Health pays the ophthalmologist, hospital costs (including the cost of the lens) and the anesthetist. You will need to pay for your eye drops. You will likely need a change in your glasses after surgery – the cost of this is your responsibility. We ask that you see your regular optometrist 6 weeks after surgery for a final follow up examination and glasses prescription if needed.

Will my cataract return? No. However, in a small percentage of people the membrane behind the lens implant may become cloudy anywhere from two months to two years after the surgery. This “secondary cataract” causes symptoms similar to cataracts. If this happens, Dr. Chan can make an opening in the membrane using a laser. This is a painless procedure taking less than a minute that is done while seated in the office.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact our office at (780) 735-4985.