

Cataracts

A cataract occurs when the lens of your eye, which is normally clear, becomes cloudy. Cataracts are a very common result of aging. Cataracts typically form over time and may eventually lead to vision problems. Although cataracts may begin to develop in a person's 40s, many individuals do not notice symptoms until their 60s or later.

70% of white Americans, 61% of Hispanic Americans, and 53% of African Americans have cataracts by age 80⁴

In addition to age, risk factors for cataracts include:

- Smoking cigarettes
- Heavy alcohol use
- Family history of cataracts
- Obesity or high blood pressure
- Prolonged use of steroids
- Eye surgery or eye injuries
- Severe air pollution
- Extensive sun or UV exposure without eye protection

Some chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, may also speed up the formation of cataracts.

61% of individuals in the United States with cataracts are women⁴

Common Symptoms

Early cataracts may not display symptoms; however, over time, individuals may experience:

- Cloudy, blurry, foggy, or filmy vision
- Double vision
- Sensitivity to bright lights
- Halos around lights
- Difficulty seeing at night
- Need for brighter light to read
- Changes in prescription glasses, including sudden nearsightedness
- Changes in color perception

Diagnosing Cataracts

Cataracts can be diagnosed during a comprehensive eye exam. Because symptoms may not be evident early on, it is important that individuals who have increased risk factors for developing cataracts get regular eye exams. With regular check-ups, you can manage symptoms and receive treatments to improve vision.

Treatment Options

For mild cataracts, vision problems may be treated with lifestyle changes and prescription glasses or contact lenses. Symptoms can also be managed by increasing the amount of light in your home, wearing anti-glare sunglasses, or using reading aids. If cataracts begin to significantly impact your vision, they can be removed surgically.

Cataract surgery most commonly involves ultrasound, a laser, or a surgical instrument to break up the cataract, which is then removed through a small surgical opening and replaced with an artificial lens implant. Cataract surgery is very safe with a high success rate, making blindness from cataracts uncommon in the United States.

Taking care of your overall health is important for disease prevention. See the [**Wellness Tips for Eye Health**](#) section of the SWHR Guide to Women's Eye Health for ideas to manage your risk of eye disease.