



“Doctor, I Have Cadillacs in My Eyes!”

“I have Cadillac’s in my eyes,” is a common phrase that I heard when I spent time at the Roseburg Veterans Administration. What these patients were actually referring to is one of the normal aging processes that take place in the eyes known as cataracts.

What are Cataracts?

Inside the eye, a lens sits right behind the colored part of the eye known as the iris. Early in life, this lens is clear. Over time, there is a clouding or darkening that takes place. At this point, it is called a cataract. Note that a film does not grow over the eye. Cataracts prevent light from focusing properly in the eye and, therefore, decrease sharpness of vision. In most cases, cataracts are considered a normal part of the aging process, but they may also result from ultraviolet light exposure (UV light from the sun), certain medications, heredity, injury or disease. Cataracts are usually found in people who are 55 years of age or older. Occasionally they are seen in younger patients and even newborns. Often they develop slowly over several years in both eyes although they can develop at different rates in each eye.

What are the Symptoms?

Cataract development varies in individuals and so do the symptoms. Here is a list of some of the common symptoms (adapted from the American Optometric Association):

- Increase in haziness causing blurred or distorted vision
- Decrease in color vision or colors seeming yellowed
- Dark spots or shadows that move with the eyes
- Needing more light to see clearly, such as for reading
- Increase in glare intensity (often noticed with night driving)
- A tendency to become more nearsighted because of an increase in lens density
- Double vision or haloes
- Experiencing a stage where it is easier to see without glasses (second sight)

Can I Prevent Cataracts?

Currently there is no known way to stop cataracts from forming, nor is there a way to make the lens clear again after it has become cloudy. Glasses and contact lenses may be used to help one see better as the cataracts are forming. However, vision may not be as razor sharp and clear as it was before the cataracts.

Cataracts may eventually impair a person’s daily activities. At this point, the only option to improve vision is surgical removal of the cataract. During surgery, the cloudy lens is removed and a clear lens implant is inserted in its place. Many times glasses or contact lenses are still required for distance vision, near vision or both. However, there are new implants that can aid distance and near vision, thus minimizing the need for glasses.

Tell Me About the Surgery

Every type of surgery has risks. Fortunately, cataract surgery has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years. To begin, the surgeon usually makes two incisions (cuts) in the eye. Then an instrument is used to break up the cloudy lens before it is removed with a vacuum-like device. The clear lens implant, which can be thought of as a tiny contact lens, is then inserted inside the eye where the clouded lens was once held. Because of the pressure inside the eyes, there is frequently no need for stitches.

The surgery usually lasts about 20 minutes and the patient typically goes home the same day. There are several different eye drops that are used to help keep the eye from infection and help it to heal properly. In addition, patients should be diligent to keep their follow-up appointments, which are usually one day, one week, one month and three months after surgery. Normally, only one eye is done at a time. If both eyes have cataracts, the surgeries are typically done about a week apart.

If you think you or someone you know may have cataracts, schedule an appointment with your eye care provider.