Cataract Awareness

In a young person, the lens is crystal clear and allows light to pass through and focus on the retina. As the lens ages, the nucleus turns yellow and loses its ability to accommodate (focus for close work) although the lens usually remains clear. As the lens continues aging, the nucleus turns from yellow to amber and ultimately to brown. Aging changes do not necessarily result in a cataract unless the nucleus becomes opaque, or opacities that block or scatter light develop in the cortex or under the capsule.

In the early stages, only your doctor may detect a cataract because you may not have any visual complaints. Your first symptom may be hazy vision only in bright light. However, at some point, you may notice other changes in your vision that could mean you’re developing a cataract. Since the signs and symptoms listed in the list below could also be symptoms of other eye conditions, it’s important to have your eyes tested regularly - every year - or whenever you notice a change in vision. Don’t overlook any symptoms or attribute them to age.

Common Signs and Symptoms:

- Distance vision is blurry, especially outdoors, but, in some cases, reading vision may be improved.
- The edges of stairs and curbs are difficult to discern. Streaks or rays of light seem to come from light sources, such as headlights and stop lights, at night.
- You instinctively shade your eyes from the sun or feel more comfortable wearing a visor.
- The reflection of light from metal on a car, road pavement, or a bright, cloudy sky may cause glare.
- Fluorescent ceiling lights or bright reading lamps may cause glare.
- Print appears faded and lacking in contrast.
- Sunglasses appear to reduce your vision.
- Highway signs, particularly on bright days, are difficult to read.
- Print is difficult to read in dim light.
- Colors appear faded or changed in hue. For example, blue may appear as a shade of green, white as gray or beige, and yellow as white.


Cataract specialists at Penn State Hershey Eye Center:

Dr. Ali Aminlari
Dr. David Liang
Dr. Joseph Sassani
Flomax and Cataract Surgery

A new study confirms the link between patients taking Flomax and complications when undergoing cataract surgery. Men taking Flomax to treat an enlarged prostate face more than double the risk for serious complications should they need cataract surgery. In this new study, 7.5% of the men who had taken Flomax in the two weeks before cataract surgery had a serious complication, compared with 2.7% of those who had not taken the drug. That makes it a 2.3 times greater risk. This study strengthens an existing study from 2005 about risks associated with taking Flomax or other alpha-blockers before cataract surgery had complications during and immediately after the procedure.

Anyone who is taking or has ever taken Flomax or a similar alpha-blocker should tell his/her eye doctor prior to scheduling cataract surgery. Do not discontinue taking an alpha-blocker without talking to your doctor.

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Did you know?

- The word cataract comes from the Greek, meaning waterfall. Until the mid 1700s, it was thought that a cataract was formed by opaque material, flowing like a waterfall, into the eye.
- General anesthesia was first introduced for surgical procedures in the late 1840s. By 1884, eye drops containing cocaine were developed. Previously, the services of a strong assistant were required to hold the patient’s head still while surgery was performed.

Eye Care Research

Clinical trials currently underway at the Penn State Hershey Eye Center are listed on the web site of the Clinical Trials Office along with contact information for each study at:

http://www.pennstatehershey.org/web/eyecenter/research/clinical_trials

POC 1 Study
Investigating the effects of doxycycline on diabetic retinopathy.

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