

Cataracts

What to expect



Medical Information Guide

Cataracts

This guide provides information for Medibank Private members and their families about cataract surgery.

It is important that you are well prepared for your healthcare experience, and know what to expect at key stages prior to, during and following this procedure.

It is also important that you discuss your particular circumstances in detail with the healthcare professionals who will be treating and caring for you. You should be confident in the treatment choices you make with your healthcare team and ensure that they are aware of your individual needs.

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As a member of Medibank Private, your entitlement to Benefits will depend on your type (hospital and/or extras) and level of cover and is subject to our Fund Rules and Policies. Premium rates, Benefits and the Fund Rules and Policies are subject to change from time to time. A copy of our Fund Rules is available at our Retail Centres or at medibank.com.au

Call us on 13 23 31 before you go to hospital to find out what you're covered for, any likely additional costs you may have to pay as well as for any other advice you may need.

The information provided in this guide is current at the time of issue, July 2008.

What is a cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of protein within the lens of the eye, resulting in blurred or hazy vision. Contrary to common belief, a cataract is not a film over the eye. Cataracts usually develop slowly over time, and can cause serious visual impairment.

The most common type of cataract is associated with ageing. Cataract can also be associated with:

- family history of cataract
- diabetes
- arthritis
- smoking
- sunlight exposure
- trauma or injury to the eye
- short-sightedness
- some medications

Why is cataract surgery performed?

Cataract surgery is performed to restore vision. Common symptoms of cataract include:

- blurry vision
- glare or light sensitivity
- colours appear faded
- needing a brighter light to read
- poor night vision
- double vision
- spots in your vision
- seeing a halo around lights

In the early stages of cataract, loss of vision may be mild enough for you to manage with new glasses or contact lenses and stronger lighting. However, over time the cataract will become denser, often requiring surgical removal of the cloudy lens and replacement with a permanent lens implant.

Referral to a specialist

Cataract surgery is a specialised procedure usually performed by an ophthalmic surgeon (ophthalmologist). Your GP can recommend and refer you to a suitable specialist.

As well as advice from your GP, you may wish to know more about the procedure and what you can expect from your specialist. The following website provides further information about cataract surgery: www.auscrs.org.au
Australasian Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgeons

Cost of treatment may also be an important consideration when selecting a specialist. A list of ophthalmic surgeons who have participated in Medibank Private's GapCover Scheme in the past can be found on our website medibank.com.au

Note: Specialists can choose to participate in GapCover on a **case-by-case** basis.

More information about GapCover can also be found on our website or in our 'Going to Hospital' booklet.

What should I discuss with my doctor or specialist?

- discuss the treatment options for your condition and why cataract surgery is being recommended
- what are the possible outcomes for each of the options you have discussed
- what is the likelihood of each of these outcomes occurring
- why your doctor has recommended a particular specialist in your case
- what experience does the specialist have, for example number of cataract procedures performed and outcomes for patients, including complication rates
- possible risks and outcomes associated with the procedure
- when any pathology results will be known
- typical recovery time
- arrangements for getting home and after care
- possible further treatment

Ideally, you should make sure that you fully understand the procedure that is going to be performed. Your specialist should explain in detail how the cataract surgery is done, and what preparation you should make. Your doctor may provide you with written material to read at home.

Your Medibank Private *'Going to Hospital'* booklet contains further questions that you may wish to ask your doctor, including information on obtaining informed financial consent.

Where is it done?

Cataract surgery is performed in either a day surgery or hospital.

How long will it take?

Time required for the procedure will vary with individual circumstances, but typically takes approximately 15 minutes, with one to two hours recovery time following the procedure.

Who is involved?

Healthcare professionals usually involved in the procedure are:

- your ophthalmologist
- an anaesthetist will give you medication to numb the eye and relax you, and will remain with you throughout the procedure
- a pathologist may also be involved for blood tests
- specialised nurses will assist with your assessment, the procedure and your recovery

How to prepare

Your specialist should provide detailed advice on the preparation required in your particular case, but in general:

- you will need to fast (have nothing to eat or drink) for six hours prior to the procedure
- you should obtain medical advice about taking prescribed medications prior to the procedure

What happens on arrival at the day surgery or hospital?

When you arrive at day surgery or hospital, you will be admitted. Necessary paperwork will need to be completed.

Prior to the procedure your specialist will ask you to sign a consent form, indicating that you give him or her permission to perform the procedure and that you understand all potential risks and complications.

What to expect during cataract surgery

Following admission, you will be taken to the procedure room and prepared for surgery. An anaesthetist may see you during this time. You will be given local anaesthetic drops to numb the eye, reduce inflammation and risk of infection and to fully dilate the pupil. In some cases, injections are given to make the eye painless and immobile during surgery. Most patients remain fully awake, however if you are very tense, a mild anaesthetic may be given via a small plastic tube called a cannula which is placed in a vein in your hand or arm.

Before the surgery, your eye will be measured using a painless ultrasound test, to determine the correct strength of the lens to be implanted.

During surgery, in most cases the cloudy lens is removed through a small incision using tiny instruments. An intraocular lens (made of plastic, acrylic or silicon) is then implanted to replace the original lens. The new lens requires no care and becomes a permanent part of your eye.

What happens after cataract surgery?

You should be able to go home after a short stay in the recovery area, and will need to attend an appointment the following day.

You should arrange for a friend or relative to accompany you, as you should not drive yourself home, or to your next specialist appointment. The day surgery or hospital should give you specific instructions about any side effects you may experience once home and any symptoms for which further assistance should be sought.

It is usual to feel mild discomfort after surgery, including watering of the eye. You will need to wear a patch over the eye until your next appointment and antibiotic and anti-inflammatory eye drops will be prescribed for several weeks.



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