



## **Cataract Blindness**

A cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye that can cause vision problems. The most common type of cataract is age related. In its early stages, this cloudiness may only affect a small part of the lens. However, over time, the cataract may grow larger and cloud more of the lens, preventing light from reaching the retina. As a result, vision can become dull and blurry.

The vision impairment caused by cataracts is easily cured. For an early cataract, vision may improve by using different eyeglasses, magnifying glasses or stronger lighting. If these measures do not help, physicians can surgically remove the cloudy lens and replace it with a substitute intraocular lens (IOL). An IOL is a clear artificial lens that requires no care and becomes a permanent part of the eye. Patients do not feel or see the lens, but it improves their vision by allowing light to reach the retina again.

The phacoemulsification technique or extracapsular surgery can remove cataracts. Phacoemulsification, the technique typically used today, allows physicians to use ultrasound waves to break up the cloudy lens and suction to remove it. Extracapsular surgery involves a longer incision in the retina and removal of the hard center of the lens without using the ultrasound waves. Surgeons then use suction to remove the remainder of the lens.

Sometimes, a cataract should be removed even if it doesn't cause problems with a patient's vision. For example, it can prevent examination or treatment of other eye problems, such as age-related macular degeneration or diabetic retinopathy.