

OPHTHALMOLOGY

Smoky eyes

If your vision's getting blurry and a change of prescription doesn't help – it could be cataracts clouding your vision.



Dr Elaine Huang
Ophthalmologist

When eyes start to age, vision can start getting blurry for many reasons. One of them is cataract, which refers to a 'clouding' of the lens.

The lens, which lies behind the iris and the pupil, lets light into the eye and adjusts to focus light onto the retina for clear vision. Made up of water and protein, the lens is typically clear. As we age, the proteins clump, resulting in formation of a cloudy area in the lens. Over time, this cloudy area or cataract progresses, making vision no longer as sharp. Other risk factors include:

- Excessive exposure to sunlight and ultraviolet radiation
- Prolonged use of steroids
- Diabetes
- Previous eye surgery, infection, inflammation or radiation
- Smoking
- In the young, cataracts can also develop due to eye trauma, genetic factors or infections during pregnancy

Foggy days are here

One of the most common complaints from patients with cataracts is about cloudy or blurred vision. Previously bright colours now appear faded or dull, and there are also complaints of glare and haloes, poor night vision or seeing double.

Treating cataracts

If you suspect that you or your loved one has a cataract, see an eye specialist. A complete eye examination will determine if anything else is contributing to the visual blurring. While cataracts rarely require emergency surgery, you should not leave them until vision is severely impaired. A simple



and reasonably safe surgery can restore vision, making it safer to perform activities like driving and sports again.

Cataract surgery is performed as a day surgery. It involves removing the clouded lens and replacing it with a clear artificial lens called an intraocular lens implant. Refractive errors and even presbyopia can be corrected with implants. There have also been advances to make cataract surgery even more precise.

The risks of cataract surgery

Among the risks is infection which happens infrequently, in 1 in 1000 surgeries. Other potential complications include intra-operative break in capsular bag, bleeding, post-operative retinal detachment and surprise refractive outcomes.

The procedure

The nurses will apply an anaesthetic eye drop to numb your eye, and dilating eye drops to facilitate removal of the cataract. The surgery usually lasts between 10 to 30 minutes and is almost painless. You will be mildly sedated, but you will still be able to hear your surgeon communicating with the nurses.

What happens after surgery?

A clear protective shield will be placed over the operated eye, to be worn at night for about one to two weeks to prevent accidental trauma during sleep. Once the sedative effects wear out within an hour, you can go home.

Mild foreign body sensation is normal after cataract surgery. The visual improvement is almost instantaneous, and by the next morning most patients are able to see down to the smallest letters on the distance chart without glasses. Reading ability without glasses is dependent on the type of intraocular lens implanted.

You will need to use eye drops comprising of antibiotics and steroids for one month after the surgery.

Cataracts never recur, but the capsular bag holding the lens implant can become cloudy over time, depending on the activity of residual cells which can proliferate and cause a spider web-like opacification of the bag. This can be treated with a painless laser procedure under topical anaesthesia. The laser is used to create a central opening in the opacified bag to restore clear vision. 