



# Live Well, Work Well

According to Prevent Blindness America, cataracts are a leading cause of blindness in the United States. More than 20 million Americans ages 40 and older have cataracts, but they can be found in young people as well—even newborns.

## VISION CARE: CATARACTS

Cataracts are a painless clouding of the eye lens which blocks the passage of light needed for vision. If you have cataracts, you may experience blurred or dimmed vision because light is not being properly transmitted through the lens to the retina. Cataracts may stay small and go unnoticed, not seriously affecting your vision, but can grow larger and cause severe vision changes over time.

### Causes

Eye lenses are made of mostly water and protein fibers. The protein fibers are specifically arranged to make the lens clear and allow light to pass through it without interference. As eyes get older, the protein fibers break down and some clump together, clouding small areas of the lens to create a cataract. As the cataract continues to develop, the clouding becomes thicker and consumes more of the lens.

### Risk Factors

Everyone is at risk of developing cataracts—age is the single greatest risk factor. The following factors could also increase your risk:

- Being of Native and/or African American heritage
- Being female
- Having a family history of cataracts
- Having dark-colored irises
- Being an adult with diabetes
- Suffering from glaucoma
- Smoking
- Certain infections during pregnancy

- Long-term use of steroid medications
- Eye injuries
- Exposure to ultraviolet light

### Signs and Symptoms

Not all cataracts impair vision or affect daily living, but when they do, common symptoms include:

- Cloudy, blurry, fuzzy, foggy or filmy vision
- Frequent changes in eyeglass prescription
- Double or multiple vision
- Difficulty performing personal, business or leisure activities because of vision problems
- Sensitivity to light and glare
- Distortion or ghost images
- Yellowish or fading colors

Cataracts do not typically cause any change in the outside appearance of your eye. Also, they are not dangerous to the physical health of your eye unless they become completely white.

### Prevention

Cataracts seem to occur with age and are unavoidable. Establishing certain lifestyle habits, however, may help slow cataract development. A few of these lifestyle habits. This include:

- Not smoking
- Wearing a hat or sunglasses when exposed to ultraviolet light from the sun or tanning beds
- Eating a diet rich in vitamins C and E
- Limiting alcohol intake
- Avoiding steroid medications if possible

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- Controlling high blood pressure and diabetes

In addition to a healthy lifestyle, a good eye specialist can detect and track cataracts. Plan to have your eyes checked every two to four years between the ages of 40 and 64, and every year or two thereafter.