

## What is Cataract?

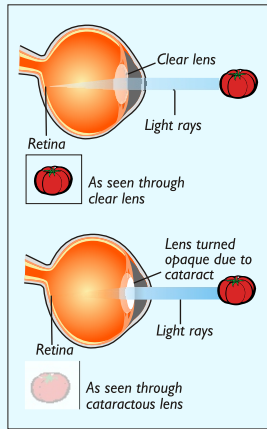
The lens inside the eye is transparent and allows light to pass through. Due to certain reasons this lens becomes opaque, allowing less light to pass through and gradually reducing the vision. This condition is called Cataract.



White pupil in both eyes with squint in the right eye

Though cataract is normally associated with old age, significant number of children are born with cataract every year. Another group of children develop cataract in their very earlier ages. Cataract can be bilateral (in two eyes) or unilateral (in one eye)

## Effects of cataract in children



Normal development of vision takes place when the light rays reach the retina of the eye. Cataract blocks these light rays and prevents them from reaching the retina, leading to reduced vision and retarded development of vision.

Surgery for cataract will not only improve vision but also prevent the development of amblyopia (lazy eye).

## Signs

- White reflex seen in the central part of the eye
- Reduced vision
- Squint (crossed eyes)
- Abnormal eye movements (Nystagmus)



White pupil in both eyes

## Reasons

- Hereditary (familial)
- Viral infections of the mother during pregnancy (eg. Rubella)
- Ocular or systemic steroids for long duration
- Injury to the eye

## Treatment

Neither eye drops, nor tablets can cure cataract. Surgery is the only way to gain vision.

## Timing of surgery

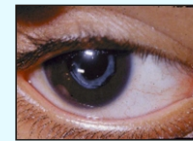
Once cataract is diagnosed, surgery should be done as early as possible. Earlier the surgery done, better will be the visual outcome.

## Types of surgery

- Removal of cataract and wearing either glasses or contact lenses.
- Removal of cataract and implanting an intraocular lens (IOL) inside the eye.



Aphakic spectacles after cataract surgery



IOL inside the eye

## Choice of surgery

Age of the child, type of cataract, other associated eye problems, general growth of the child and the ability of parents to comprehend the problem will determine the type of surgery opted for the child by the ophthalmologist.

IOLs can be safely implanted in the eyes of children aged 2 years and above.

## Post operative management

- The child should be brought regularly for an eye examination as per the doctor's advice.
- We prefer the child to stay back in the hospital for a minimum of 2-3 days after the surgery to check their healing process which is different from that of adults.
- Since children are prone to get injured, their outdoor activities should be restricted for at least 4-6 weeks.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Should very young babies with cataract in both eyes undergo surgery immediately?**  
Yes, for children with cataract in both the eyes, surgery should be performed in both eyes over a short period of time, preferably before the child is 2-3 months of age.
- 2. Will a 2 month old baby be able to withstand surgery?**  
Yes, medical science has developed to such an extent that even a new born can undergo eye surgery under general anesthesia without any problem, after taking safety precautions for smooth recovery.
- 3. Will the child need to wear glasses after surgery?**  
Yes, the child must wear glasses. It is the duty of the parents to ensure that the child wears glasses comfortably and continuously.
- 4. Will young children wear thick glasses?**  
Children are basically very smart. Though they may initially resist, once they realise that they can see well with the glasses, even an infant will develop an affinity towards it. When there is no lens implanted the spectacle will be thick and of high power. If IOL is implanted it will be thin with an addition for near work.

**5. Is the child in need of any other treatment after surgery?**



Apart from wearing glasses, the child may have to be given patching therapy, to improve vision, if amblyopia or lazy eye has developed. Depending upon the surgery performed, YAG (Laser) capsulotomy or other minor

surgical procedures may become necessary in due course.

**6. Can normal vision be got back after cataract surgery?**

Age at the onset of cataract, type of surgery, time interval between the onset of cataract and surgery, regular use of glasses and the state and growth of the eyes and brain, will determine the visual outcome following surgery.

**7. Can nutritious food and vitamin tablets cure cataract?**

No, they cannot.

**Early intervention for cataract prevents permanent loss of vision in children.**

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**Can Cataract also develop in Children?**