

Lens Implant Choices After Cataract Surgery

The lens of your eye is an important structure. In order to see clearly at all distances (from up close to far away), your eye must be able to change its focus power. The lens of your eye is responsible for this change in focus—it changes its shape to bring whatever you're looking at into clear focus. In your early 40's you lost the ability to see up close, and required either bifocals, or at least reading glasses. This was because as we age, the lens hardens and cannot change its shape anymore, and in order to focus at different distances, more than one glasses prescription was required.

As we age even more, the lens becomes cloudy. This cloudiness of the lens is called a cataract. Cataract is a common problem among aging Americans, and cataract surgery is the most common surgery performed on adults in the United States. In cataract surgery, the cloudy lens is removed. In order for you to see clearly afterward, a new lens (called an intraocular lens implant, or IOL) must be inserted at the time of surgery.

Selecting the right implant for your eye is very important for your vision after surgery. Your doctor will take measurements before your surgery to determine how strong your lens is, so an implant with the same strength can be put in during the surgery. If you wear glasses, the implant strength can be adjusted to replace both your lens and your glasses.

Like your aging lens, the implant cannot change its shape to help you see both up close and off at a distance. But several options are available to help you minimize—or even eliminate—your need for any type of glasses after cataract surgery.



Talk with your doctor about the various types of implants available, and their effects on your vision after surgery.

For instance, your doctor may place implants in your eyes with the appropriate strength for you to see well at a distance, and you can wear reading glasses when you want to see up close, such as for reading.

Another option is for your doctor to select the implant strength for you to see clearly off at a distance for one eye, and a different strength—the one for up close—for your other eye, so that you can see clearly at all distances without glasses after surgery. This works well for most people, but some people have trouble with depth perception when their two eyes are focused at different distances.

In recent years, several types of bifocal and/or multifocal implants have been developed. These lenses allow you to see clearly at a variety of distances, effectively eliminating the need for glasses. Several manufacturers, including Alcon, Advanced

Medical Optics, and Eyeonics, have recently received approval from the FDA for new technology multi-focal lenses following cataract surgery. It should be noted, however, that multi-focal lens technology is evolving rapidly and patients are encouraged to consult with their doctor about these offerings. Also, this technology is relatively expensive and is considered elective by Medicare and most payers, thus the difference in price between a standard cataract IOL and the new technology must be paid by the patient.

Talk with your doctor about the various types of implants available, and their effects on your vision after surgery. You and your doctor will develop a plan that pairs you with the best type of implants for your eyes and your vision needs.