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### *What Are Cataracts?*

A cataract is the clouding of the natural lens of the eye. This is similar to a cloudy lens in a camera. Because of this, light and images cannot be properly focused through the cataract onto the retina, which is similar to the film in the camera. The retina converts the images to electrical impulses that travel through the optic nerve to the brain. Cataracts are a problem that can affect anyone. Studies show that approximately 70% of all people over 75 will develop cataracts.

### *Symptoms of Cataracts*

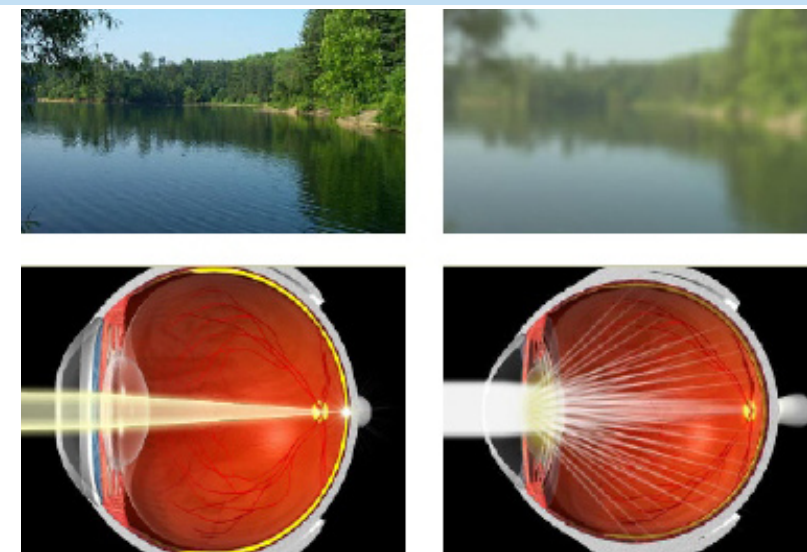
The clouding of the lens initially occurs slowly, so it may not be noticed at first. Over time, vision may grow fuzzy and one may notice difficulty seeing while driving, especially at night. As the cataract becomes denser, glare will become worse and one may even see halos. Also, colors become less vivid and the reading of small print may become more difficult.

### *Treatment of Cataracts*

Once cataracts become more advanced to the point that glasses cannot correct the symptoms, surgical correction of the cloudy lens is recommended. During surgery, the cloudy lens is removed with an advanced technique called phacoemulsification. In this surgical procedure, a micro-incision is made with an ultrasound probe, which is about the size of a pen tip, to remove the cloudy lens. The greatest advantages of this procedure are that it usually only takes fifteen minutes to perform, is safer, and rarely requires sutures or needles. Also, the surgery does not require anesthesia so the patient will have an easier and quicker recovery period. Most patients may even have permission from their physician to drive the day after their surgery.

### *Recent Advances in Cataract Surgery*

The major advances in cataract surgery have come with the modification of the intraocular lens (IOL). IOL is the replacement lens that is surgically implanted into the eye to replace the existing clouded lens during cataract surgery.



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Traditionally, the replacement lens used for cataract surgery was a mono-focal IOL. This type of lens restored good functional distance vision, but most people still needed reading glasses. Today, we have the option of implanting a multi-focal lens, which can improve vision in a fuller range, from both near to far vision. Up to 80% of these patients require no glasses at all.

Just recently, IOL's to correct astigmatism have become available. With astigmatism, the eye is more oval or "football" shaped. Images are then focused on more than one point onto the retina, causing them to be blurred or distorted. These intraocular lens now give much clearer vision without glasses.

### *Take Care of Your Eyes*

What can you do to protect your eyes? Have an annual dilated eye exam by your eye care provider. In addition to cataracts, other eye diseases such as glaucoma (elevated eye pressure) and macular degeneration (deterioration of the central retina) should also be checked annually. Always have your eyes checked if you notice a change in your vision.

If you do have cataracts, the good thing is that surgery with recent innovations can return you to normal or near-normal vision in a very short time. The surgical and recovery times have shortened over the years and you should be back to everyday living in no time, but seeing much more clearly.

### *About the Author*

Mark Manocha, M.D., completed his medical training at Louisiana State University Medical School, and his residency at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. He has been in practice in Savannah since 1996, specializing in cataract surgery and comprehensive ophthalmology. As part of SouthCoast Medical Group, he sees patients at Georgia Eye Institute in Savannah. He also sees patients in Hinesville, Pooler and Jesup. He can be contacted at (912) 350-4812 or toll free at 1 (866) 225-0230.