



Preparing for cataract surgery

What is cataract surgery?

A cataract forms when the natural lens in your eye becomes cloudy. Modern surgery allows the damaged lens to be removed and replaced with an artificial lens.

What type of anaesthetic will I have?

- Most people are awake during the procedure and have local anaesthetic to numb the eye.
- This may either be in the form of drops, or a numbing injection around the eye.
- Occasionally people require some sedation (medicine to relax you).
- A small number (1 per cent or 1 in 100 people) may need a general anaesthetic for medical reasons (anaesthetic drugs make you unconscious, so you are completely unaware throughout your operation).
- Your anaesthetist will discuss with you the best options for you, based on your age, health and any difficulty the surgeon anticipates.

How long will I be in hospital for?

You will usually be in the hospital for between four and six hours but longer if you need a general anaesthetic.

Before the operation

- If you have existing medical conditions (eg diabetes, high blood pressure, chest or heart disease) check with your GP well ahead of your surgery that your medication is up to date and as effective as it can be. This can help prevent delays to your surgery and give you the best chance of your operation and recovery going well.
- You should take your normal medication to the hospital with you. The staff will advise you on how and when to take it on the day of the operation.
- Remember to wear any hearing aids and take spare batteries.
- It is normal to feel anxious about an operation. To help you relax before and after your surgery think about bringing some headphones and music with you, or something to read. Consider learning some breathing exercises or relaxation techniques.
- Shower and wash your hair before you come in for the operation, as you should not get your eye wet for two weeks afterwards.





- Eat and drink normally beforehand, unless told otherwise by your hospital.
- Think about how you will manage when you come home after your operation, especially if you have poor vision in your other eye. It might be useful to rearrange your furniture and where you plan to sleep so you don't have to use the stairs too much for the first few days.
- You should arrange for an able-bodied adult to take you home and be with you the first night at home after surgery if possible. This is essential if you have had sedation or a general anaesthetic. If you have others you care for, you should arrange appropriate help for them too.
- Plan meals that are easy to prepare for the first few days after your surgery or prepare and freeze them ahead of the operation.
- You will need regular eye drops after your operation. It may be helpful if someone else can put these in for you to start with. If there is no one to help you with this, your GP practice might be able to help. Pharmacies sell dispensers that can help you put drops in.
- Wear comfortable clothes as you will need to lie still during the operation. Sometimes you may get a little water dripping down your neck, so a change of top may be helpful. A few layers of clothing are useful as the temperature in hospitals can vary. You may otherwise feel hot or cold while waiting.



After the operation

- After cataract surgery under local anaesthetic most people recover quickly and go home. If you have had sedation you might feel drowsy or a little more unsteady.
- After your operation your eye should feel comfortable. It might start to feel uncomfortable or a little gritty when the anaesthetic wears off.
- You may be a little more unsteady for a few days whilst you adapt to your change in vision.

Research shows that on the first day after cataract surgery:



1 in 5

patients reported
feeling cold



1 in 3

patients reported
feeling thirsty



3 in 20

patients had
moderate or
severe pain*

*Walker EMK et al. Patient reported outcome of adult perioperative anaesthesia in the United Kingdom: a cross-sectional observational study. *Br J Anaesth* 2016;**117**:758–766.

Recovering at home

- Wash your hands carefully before touching your eye or putting in drops.
- Make sure you put in your eye drops regularly as instructed.
- If you feel any discomfort, take medication you would normally take for a headache.
- Wear the shield at night to protect your eye for the first few days.
- If you wear glasses, the lens on the operated side will no longer be suitable. It takes at least six weeks for your vision to settle down completely, so don't rush to have an eye test and buy new glasses – sometimes just popping out the lens in your existing glasses can be helpful.
- Do not get your eye wet for two weeks or ideally swim for a month. You can though shower your body or bathe before that time.
- You can do normal exercise after a week but do not lift heavy weights or do any strenuous exercise for two weeks. In the first week try not to bend down to pick things up although it is difficult to avoid some bending.
- You may have some bruising around your eye – this can take a week or two to go away but should cause no problems.
- You will likely feel tired for a day or so as your body recovers. This is normal so don't try to do too much in the days after the operation.

Things to look out for at home

You should contact your GP or the hospital where you had your surgery if:

- your eye becomes painful or red
- you notice a discharge from the eye
- your vision becomes blurred or gets worse
- you continue to feel discomfort after a week.

These symptoms may occur if you have developed an infection and may need further treatment, usually with antibiotics.

If you feel very unwell you should go to your nearest accident and emergency department as soon as possible.



Additional resources available online

Royal College of Anaesthetists

- Preparing for surgery: Fitter Better Sooner toolkit and animation (www.rcoa.ac.uk/fitterbettersooner)
- Local anaesthesia for your eye operation (www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/leaflets-video-resources)
- Sedation explained (www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/sedation)



Preparing for surgery | Cataract surgery

- Caring for someone who has had a general anaesthetic or sedation (www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/sedation)
- Risks associated with your anaesthetic (www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/risks)
- Patient information series (www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/leaflets-video-resources)

Royal College of Surgeons of England

- Recovery tracker (bit.ly/2LDPqi0)
- Cataract surgery (bit.ly/2mJkleD)

Royal College of Ophthalmologists and the Royal National Institute of Blind People

- Understanding cataracts (bit.ly/2mHlouq)

NHS Choices

- Cataract surgery (www.nhs.uk/conditions/cataract-surgery)

The College of Optometrists

- Cataracts (www.lookafteryoureyes.org/eye-conditions/cataracts)

Guidance for those with learning disabilities from SeeAbility

- What is a cataract? (Easy Read) (bit.ly/2LAgqyW)
- Having a cataract operation (Easy Read) (bit.ly/2mHPYp3)



Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this leaflet. If you have any comments that you would like to make, please email them to patientinformation@rcoa.ac.uk

This leaflet has been reviewed by the RCoA Patient Information Group (which includes lay members) and by the RCoA Professional Standards Advisory Group.

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