

# ASK AHSC

## ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

From The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

**Q** My mother thinks she has cataracts but she doesn't want surgery because she thinks she'll have to wear glasses all the time afterward. Is that true? I don't know what to tell her about cataract surgery.

**A** Cataract surgery has changed a lot over the years. Modern technology and techniques have enhanced outcomes, reduced risks and hastened recovery times.

Cataract surgery now is one of the most common surgical procedures in this county. The procedure is performed on an outpatient basis through very small incisions, with fast vision recovery.

The cataract is replaced with a tiny plastic lens implanted permanently in the eye. The optical power of this intraocular lens (IOL) can be calculated, using pre-operative measurements of the eye and the curvature of the cornea, so that the implant restores normal vision.

Some patients may still require reading glasses or minor corrective glasses to be worn after surgery. However, IOLs are available to correct presbyopia (the need for reading glasses) and these lenses are suitable for many patients.

Astigmatism also can be corrected at the time of cataract surgery by small incisions or astigmatic keratotomies. This may reduce further the patient's dependence on glasses.

A new IOL that focuses much like the eye's natural lens to reduce or eliminate the need for



glasses after cataract surgery is likely to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration soon.

Laser surgery and other treatments for cataracts also are being developed but are not yet available for routine use.

Vision recovery from cataract surgery can be almost immediate, with patients seeing very well in the first day or two. Glasses, if necessary, are pre-

scribed in one to two weeks. Patients resume their normal lifestyle within days after cataract surgery.

Patients no longer need to wait for a cataract to be "ripe" before it is removed. Cataract surgery now is performed when the cataract causes visual changes that disturb the patient's lifestyle or diminish quality of life.

Some cataracts never reach the point where they need to be removed, but if your mother's cataracts are interfering with her everyday tasks or her ability to drive, then she should discuss cataract surgery with her eye care provider.

Age increases the risk of cataracts as well as other "silent" eye diseases such as glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy, so regular eye exams are important to avoid developing serious eye problems. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends a comprehensive eye examination by an ophthalmologist every two to four years for people age 40 to 64 and every one to two years for people age 65 or older.

Have your mother consult her eye care provider. Fortunately, there are many highly skilled cataract surgeons in the Tucson medical community.

Often, a new eyeglass prescription will correct vision problems, but if cataract surgery is necessary, she may benefit from advanced technology and may find the procedure is safer, more accessible, and better than she thought.

—Robert Snyder, MD, PhD,  
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