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## **Don't Lose Sight of Cataracts: Information for People at Risk**

### **What is cataract?**

When the lens of your eye gets cloudy, it is called a cataract. It can cause vision loss in one or both eyes. It cannot spread from one eye to the other.

### **What causes a cataract?**

The lenses of the eyes are made mostly of water and protein. As we age, some of this protein may clump

together and cloud the lenses of our eyes. Over time, this “cloud” may grow and cover more of the lens. This makes it harder to see. Smoking, alcohol use, diabetes, and prolonged exposure to the sun can also cause cataracts.

### **When are you most likely to have a cataract?**

Older people mostly get cataracts. But people in their 40s and 50s may get them, especially if the eye has been injured.

The risk of having a cataract increases after age 60, and by age 80, more than half of all Americans will have a cataract or will have had cataract surgery.

### **What are the symptoms of a cataract?**

When you first get a cataract, you may not notice much change. Your vision may become blurry as if looking through a foggy window. Or colors may not appear as bright.

### **How do I know if I have a cataract?**

An eye care professional can tell if you have a cataract by giving you a comprehensive dilated eye exam. During the exam, drops are placed in your eyes to widen, or dilate, the pupils.

Then a special lens is used to look inside the eye. This exam may help find cataracts as well as other eye problems. After the exam, your vision may be blurry for a period of hours.

### **When should a cataract be treated?**

You should treat a cataract when it makes it hard for you to do daily tasks, like reading or driving. But first, you and your eye care professional should talk about what is best

for you. You should never feel rushed to make a decision.

### **How is a cataract treated?**

When a cataract first starts, an eye care professional may give you eyeglasses, and suggest brighter lighting, antiglare sunglasses, or magnifying lenses. If these don't help, the doctor may perform surgery. Doctors numb the area around the eye, take out the cloudy lens and replace it with a new one.

### **What can you do to protect your vision?**

To delay a cataract, wear sunglasses and a hat with a brim to block ultraviolet rays from the sun. Also, stop smoking and eat more leafy green vegetables, fruits, and foods with a lot of antioxidants. If you are age 60 or older, you should have a comprehensive dilated

eye exam at least once a year. In addition to cataracts, your eye care professional can check for signs of other age-related eye problems such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration. Early treatment for these other eye diseases may save your vision.

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