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Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at Cook, Hall & Hyde, Inc.

Vision Care: Cataracts

If you have cataracts, you may experience blurred or dimmed vision because light is not being properly transmitted through the lens to the retina.

Cataracts are a painless clouding of the eye lens which blocks the passage of light needed for vision. Cataracts may stay small and go unnoticed, and often do not seriously affect your vision. However, some grow larger and cause severe vision changes over time.

Causes

Lenses are made of mostly water and protein fibers. The protein fibers are specifically arranged to make the lens clear and allow light to pass through it without interference. However, as eyes get older, the protein fibers break down and some clump together, clouding small areas of the lens creating a cataract. As the cataract continues to develop, the clouding becomes thicker and consumes more of the lens.

Risk Factors

Everyone is at risk of developing cataracts simply because age is the single greatest risk factor. The following factors could also increase your risk:

- Being of Native and/or African American heritage
- Being female
- Having a family history of cataracts
- Having darker-colored irises
- Being an adult with diabetes
- Suffering from glaucoma

- Smoking
- Certain infections during pregnancy
- Long-term use of steroid medications
- Eye injuries
- Exposure to ultraviolet light

Signs and Symptoms

Not all cataracts impair vision or affect daily living. However, when they do, common symptoms include:

- Cloudy, blurry, fuzzy, foggy or filmy vision
- Glares from lamps or the sun
- Difficulty driving at night
- Frequent changes in eyeglass prescription
- Double or multiple vision
- Difficulty performing personal, business or leisure activities because of vision problems
- Sensitivity to light and glare
- Distortion or ghost images
- Yellowish or fading colors

Cataracts do not typically cause any change in the outside appearance of your eye. In addition, they are not dangerous to the physical health of your eye unless it becomes completely white.

Prevention

Cataracts seem to occur with age

and are not avoidable. However, establishing certain lifestyle habits may help slow cataract development, such as:

- Not smoking
- Wearing a hat or sunglasses when exposed to ultraviolet light from the sun or tanning beds
- Eating a diet rich in vitamins C and E
- Limiting alcohol intake
- Avoiding steroid medications if possible
- Controlling high blood pressure and diabetes

In addition to a healthy lifestyle, regular eye exams can also help slow the development of cataracts. A good eye specialist can detect and track them. Plan to have your eyes checked every two to four years between the ages of 40 and 64, and every year or two after age 65.



Did You Know...?

According to Prevent Blindness America, cataracts are a leading cause of blindness in the United States. More than 20 million Americans ages 40 and older have cataracts, but they can be found in young people as well – even newborns.