

The Utah Guide to Cataract Care

During the next 10 years, more men and women in the United States will undergo cataract removal and lens implantation than at any other time in history. Along with the aging of the Baby Boomers came tremendous breakthroughs in cataract surgical procedures and lens implant technology. This Guide to Cataract Care provides an overview of recent cataract developments in an effort to help you make a more informed decision about one of the life's most precious gifts: your vision.

Thanks to recent advancements in lens implant technology and surgical techniques, cataract surgery today is one of the safest, most successful surgical procedures performed in medicine. Each year more than one million men and women have their vision restored through cataract removal and lens implantation.

A cataract is simply part of the body's normal aging process and involves a progressive clouding of the eye's natural lens. This aging actually starts around ages 45-50 and interferes with light passing through to the retina, or back portion of the eye. Because it happens so gradually – and usually over a long period of time – many people do not notice a significant change in their vision until vision loss has occurred.

Fortunately, clear vision can be restored in most patients by simply removing the cataract and replacing it with a specially designed Intraocular Lens (IOL).

New Lens Implant Options

To compensate for the removal of the eye's natural lens, an IOL is implanted into the eye. This specially manufactured lens is about the size of Lincoln's head on a penny and weighs little more than a single kernel of corn. Each IOL is manufactured and polished to the precise curvature needed to focus light rays properly on the retina in the back of your eye.

In the past, cataract patients received conventional single-focus IOLs. This standard lens provided patients with only distance vision and did not correct astigmatism or other common refractive disorders.

Exciting advances in IOL design now give cataract patients – and surgeons – a number of options in lens implant technology and power. Advanced IOLs provide patients expanded ranges of vision following their cataract procedure.

Standard 'Single Focus' Cataract Lens Implant

This option is for patients who do not mind wearing glasses after cataract surgery. The single focus or monofocal lenses are FDA and Medicare approved and will give you good distance vision only. Because they do not correct astigmatism, most patients receiving a monofocal lens need to wear prescription glasses for both distance vision and near vision.

High Definition Custom Lens Implant

An aspheric monofocal IOL is now available that offers you the best vision under night-driving conditions. It will also provide good distance vision under low light conditions, but it does not treat astigmatism or provide intermediate or near vision. Patients can have astigmatism surgically corrected at the same time as their procedure. Dr. Monroe uses special testing and diagnostics to customize your surgical treatment plan.

Toric 'Astigmatism-Correcting' Cataract Lens Implant

This lens is ideal for cataract patients who do not mind wearing reading glasses for near vision, but want freedom from glasses for distance vision. The Toric IOL is specially designed to treat your astigmatism with the lens instead of surgical incisions. Patients will require prescription glasses for intermediate and near vision.

Blended Vision or 'Modified Monovision'

This option is for patients who desire both distance and intermediate vision following cataract surgery, but who do not mind wearing glasses for near vision and night driving. This concept is similar to wearing monovision contact lenses. IOLs are available that help provide patients with good distance and intermediate vision. Dr. Monroe uses special testing and diagnostics to customize your surgical treatment plan.

Multifocal IOLs

The new multifocal IOLs are the latest breakthrough in cataract surgery. They are specially designed to provide you a fuller, less-restricted range of vision. Ideally, they provide good distance, intermediate and near vision with reduced dependence on prescription eyewear. For maximum benefit, patients receiving these lenses must have very healthy eyes with no ocular disease or related pathology.

Laser Cataract Surgery

The latest advancement in cataract surgery involves using an advanced Femtosecond laser to perform the portions of the cataract procedure. The laser is designed to treat astigmatism and perform eye incisions. The remainder of the cataract procedure is performed using a method known as phacoemulsification, which helps liquefy and remove the cataract. Typically no stitches are required.

When To Have Your Cataract Removed

The best time to have your cataract removed is when your quality of life has been diminished because of poor vision. If you are bothered by glare, halos around lights, or even double vision, cataracts could be the problem. With the advances in modern surgery and new diagnostic tools available to measure the effect of your cataracts, there is no reason to wait until substantial vision loss has occurred. If you suspect you have a cataract, please call our office and schedule a quick and easy screening with one of our doctors.

Understanding Your Medicare Coverage

If you are over the age of 65 and have significant cataracts, Medicare will cover the cost of cataract surgery along with a Monofocal IOL. The new lenses and lasers are approved by Medicare and the FDA, but their additional costs are not covered by Medicare or most private insurance companies because these lenses and lasers are not considered medically necessary. Astigmatism management is also considered an elective procedure and is not covered by most insurance companies.

Our staff will explain these costs and answer any questions you may have about the risks and complications of lens replacement surgery.