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Contact lenses. Like cataract glasses, contact lenses are not routinely used after cataract surgery. The lenses provide almost normal vision, but their major drawback is that people often have difficulty handling, removing, and cleaning them. The frequent handling of contact lenses may also increase the risk of eye infection. Because the patient must be able to see when the contacts are not in place, a pair of cataract glasses is also necessary. Both the contacts and glasses can be prescribed four to eight weeks after surgery.

After Surgery

Most people experience minimal discomfort after cataract surgery; a mild painkiller (such as Tylenol) can be taken if needed. Some redness, scratchiness, or morning discharge may be present during the first few days after surgery. In addition, it is common to see a few black spots or shapes (called floaters) drifting through the field of vision. A protective patch is generally worn over the eye for 24 hours. Glasses must be worn during the day to avoid trauma to the eye, and an eye shield is used at night for several days to a few weeks to prevent accidentally rubbing or poking the eye while asleep.

Vision varies widely when the patch is first removed. In most people, vision remains blurred for several days to weeks, then gradually improves as the eye heals. In some cases, the sutures in the eye alter the shape of the cornea and result in temporary blurring or astigmatism. This problem generally goes away on its own, though it may require removal of the sutures—a simple and painless procedure. In general, vision improves faster in those who receive intraocular lens implants than in those with cataract glasses or contact lenses. However, surgery usually changes the corrective prescription for the eye (even in those with lens implants), and new eyeglasses will be needed to correct any remaining near- or farsightedness. The patient is considered fully recovered when the eye is completely healed and vision has stabilized so that a final corrective prescription can be obtained.

Possible Complications of Surgery

Though cataract surgery is associated with a low rate of complications, problems may arise, especially in older adults or those with general health problems such as diabetes. Patients should contact their doctor if any of the following symptoms develop during

NEW RESEARCH

Multifocal Lenses Don't Boost Satisfaction With Cataract Surgery

People who have multifocal lenses implanted after cataract surgery are less likely to need reading glasses afterwards than those who receive monofocal lenses, but they aren't any happier about their quality of vision. The reason is that people who get multifocal lenses appear to have unrealistic expectations about the device, according to a new study.

Dutch researchers randomized 75 people who needed cataract surgery to receive either monofocal or multifocal lenses. Patients were counseled about what to expect from each of the implants.

Three months after both eyes had been operated on, about 90% of the patients in both groups were satisfied with their quality of near and far vision when using glasses. Although more people in the multifocal group were able to see well without reading glasses most of the time (43% vs. 22%), they were no more likely than those in the monofocal group to state that their expectations of surgery were met (62% vs. 63%).

The researchers conclude that although multifocal lenses can reduce people's dependence on reading glasses, more than half of people who receive them still need glasses—and that patients should be aware of this before surgery.

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