

Seniors Taking Charge

Cataract Awareness

By Mindy Bell

Hot and sunny summer days often call for wide-brimmed hats, sandals, sunglasses, and other accessories to beat the heat and battle the sun. While a new pair of sunglasses may keep you looking chic for the summer, eye care professionals encourage their use for the practical benefits, such as helping to protect our eyes from UV radiation emitted from the sun's rays.

Keeping our eyes healthy and maintaining good vision are essential to many everyday tasks, from driving a car to avoiding trips and falls in the home. However, a common eye problem that affects over half of Americans by age 80 is cataracts. A cataract is a clouding of the clear lens inside the eye (the part of the eye that focuses light onto the back of the eye that allows us to see images). The lens is made up of water and proteins, and sometimes the proteins inside the lens clump together, which can cause clouding. When the lens gets clouded, vision may become blurry.

Cataracts are most often related to aging, and can occur in one or both eyes. The cloudy area in the lens may

start out small, and may not impair vision. Over time, however, cataracts often grow larger and begin to interfere with vision and daily activities. At that point, your eye care professional may recommend treatment to remove the cataract.

Common symptoms you may notice if you have a cataract (which may overlap with other eye disorders) are blurred vision and poor night vision, glare that makes lights appear brighter or causes a halo, double vision, and frequent prescription changes in your eyeglasses or contact lenses. Your eye doctor can detect cataracts through a comprehensive eye exam.

Cataract surgery is one of the most common and safest types of surgery performed in the U.S. It is usually quite successful in restoring vision, too. The procedure involves removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with an artificial lens that becomes part of your eye.

Along with advancing age, there are other risk factors that may increase the chance of getting cataracts,

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including having certain diseases, such as diabetes, smoking or alcohol use, and prolonged exposure to UV sunlight. Wearing sunglasses, avoiding smoking, and consuming a variety of healthy foods, including plenty of fruits and vegetables, may help to delay cataracts.

Remember to get your eyes checked, too. Visit an eye care professional regularly. Along with checking for cataracts, your doctor can screen and monitor for other problems at the same time. If you have a sudden change in vision, you should schedule a visit immediately.

For more information, see:

NIH senior health,
<http://nihseniorhealth.gov>

National Eye Institute, NIH,
<http://www.nei.nih.gov>.



Here are some ideas to inspire your meals and snacks using our bounty of fresh summer produce:

- ❖ Enjoy a diced local peach on whole grain cereal for an energizing breakfast.
- ❖ Build a salad with dark leafy greens, ripe, juicy tomatoes, cucumbers, and other seasonal vegetables.
- ❖ Have sweet corn on the cob to accompany hamburgers and other summer fare.
- ❖ Make a light summer dessert using fresh berries with whipped topping, pudding, or yogurt.
- ❖ Bite into a juicy slice of watermelon for a summer evening snack.
- ❖ Try summer squash roasted, grilled, or breaded and oven-baked.
- ❖ Enjoy peas as a simple side with a variety of main dishes.

Have a delicious and healthy summer!