**What is a cataract?**
A cataract is a clouding or cloudy area in the natural lens of the eye. Your lens is behind the colored part of your eye (iris). Its job is to focus light onto the back of your eye. In some people, cataracts prevent light from reaching the back of the eye or cause the light image to be out of focus.

**What is cataract surgery?**
Cataract surgery helps you see better. It replaces your natural lens with a clear artificial one. Drops are put in the eye to open the pupil giving access to the lens.

The surgery is most often done under local anesthetic. This means that you are awake. Pills or an IV are given to relax you and your eye is numbed by either an eye drop or an injection around the eye.

The most common type of cataract surgery is called **phacoemulsification.** The doctor or a laser makes a small cut at the edge of the colored part of your eye. This is called an incision. The doctor then uses a small ultrasound tool to break the lens into tiny pieces. Sometimes a laser is used for this too. These pieces are then removed through the tiny incision using lots of water. In most cases, the doctor inserts the artificial lens through the incision.

The incision may seal by itself or may be closed with stitches. At the end of surgery, a shield will be placed on the eye.
How do I prepare for cataract surgery?

Before surgery:
Arrange for someone to help:
1. Drive you to and from the surgery center.
2. Stay with you for the first 24 hours.
3. Drive you to your postoperative appointment.

The prescriptions will likely have been faxed to your pharmacy. Pick up your eye drops from the pharmacy at least one week before surgery and start using them as directed by your eye drop schedule.

You will need to have a physical exam before the day of surgery. This may also include blood tests, an EKG, or chest x-ray. You will receive instructions about any medicines to stop taking while you prepare for surgery.

You will receive a call from the surgery center 1-2 days before surgery with the details of your arrival time and to give you instructions about when to stop eating and drinking.

On the day of surgery:
- Bathe, remove all nail polish and make-up, take off all jewelry, do not wear perfumes or deodorants
- Bring a photo ID, insurance card, eye drops, eye drop schedule and this instruction sheet

How do I care for my eye after surgery?

Shield and drops:
- You will have a shield on your eye after surgery. This can be removed the morning after surgery.
- Wear the shield when sleeping for 1 week after surgery. After the first night, you may sleep on either side. Wear dark sunglasses when outside as the eye might be more sensitive to light.
- Follow the instructions given to you by the surgery center about when to start the eye drop schedule.
**Pain:** It is normal to have a scratchy feeling in the eye for a couple of days after surgery. Call your doctor if you have an ache that is not controlled with acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

**Activity:**
- Shower or bathe as usual, but be careful not to get soap into your eyes. Be careful stepping in the shower.
- You may watch TV and read. You may need reading glasses and many times an over the counter pair will work. You can discuss this with your doctor.
- No swimming (pools or natural bodies of water) or hot tubs for 2 weeks.
- Be careful on stairs and do not drive until cleared by your doctor. Depth perception may be impaired for a bit after surgery.
- Moderate exercise or sexual activity will not harm the eye. No strenuous activity for 1 week. No lifting more than 25 pounds for 1 week. A good rule of thumb is that if it makes you “red in the face,” avoid it for one week.
- If you have had a multifocal or toric lens, no jumping or jolting activities (horseback riding/aerobics) for 2 weeks.
- Do not rub your eye for at least 1 month.

- Most people feel well enough to travel 2 days after their surgery. This includes air travel. We suggest that you do not travel to remote areas for 1 week after surgery.

**When will I get new glasses?**
- Most patients receive new prescription eyeglasses 4-6 weeks after surgery if needed. We need the eye to heal and the inflammation to settle before prescribing new glasses or the prescription might change.
- Sometimes a doctor might suggest an over-the-counter pair of glasses to help during this time.
- If you have astigmatism, your vision after surgery may be limited until you are fitted with glasses.
- If you have other eye diseases such as macular degeneration or glaucoma, your vision may be limited even after your cataract is removed.

**Call your doctor right away if you have**
- An increase in swelling or redness
- Any increase in pain or discharge from the eye
- A decrease in vision
- Nausea or vomiting
Phone Numbers
Clinic Staff can be reached Monday through Friday from 8:00 am until 5:00 pm. Closed on holidays.

UW Health University Clinic
(608) 263-7171
2880 University Ave., Madison

UW Health Deming Way Clinic
(608) 824-3937
2349 Deming Way, Middleton

UW Health East Clinic
(608) 265-1270
5249 E. Terrace Dr., Madison

When the clinic is closed, call the Paging Operator at (608) 262-0486. Ask for the “Ophthalmology Resident on Call.” Give the operator your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live outside the area, call our toll-free number 1-800-323-8942

Please call if you have any questions or concerns.

The Spanish version of this Health Facts for You is #6581

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2016 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4205