Your First Appointment:
The Important Questions to Ask When Choosing a Cataract Surgeon
# Table of Contents

- **Introduction** .......................................................... 3
- **Finding a Cataract Surgeon** ........................................... 6
- **Determining the IOL That’s Best for You** .................. 8
- **Risks and Benefits of Cataract Surgery** .............. 9
Chapter 1: Introduction

You can’t see like you used to. Even when you’re outside on a sunny day, it feels like someone has dimmed the lights. Driving at night is especially challenging. Your vision is cloudy, blurred, and colors seem faded.

These are the most common symptoms of cataracts, although people may experience cataracts differently. For some, it may feel like headlights, lamps, and even the sun is too bright, as any light causes a glare in your vision. At night, halos may appear around lights, or it may be hard to distinguish blues and purples since they will both appear as black.

What Are Cataracts?

Cataracts are formed when protein deposits build up on the lens of the eye. This clouding of the eye’s lens skews light and blocks it from reaching the retina. This results in blurred or cloudy vision, colors fading, or everything seeming darker.

Cataracts are extremely common, and often form as a natural part of the aging process, but this doesn’t mean younger and middle-aged people are immune to getting them. In fact, fifteen to twenty percent of people who undergo cataract surgery at Kremer are under age 55. By age 80, half of all Americans either have cataracts or have undergone cataract surgery.
Introduction

Do You Need Cataract Surgery?

Once you’ve visited your eye doctor and received a definitive diagnosis of cataracts, it’s time to decide when you need surgery.

Decades ago, patients would have to wait until a cataract became “ripe” before it could be removed. Thanks to significant advances in cataract surgery technology, this is no longer true. Cataracts do generally get worse with time, however, and could eventually result in complete vision loss, so the best time to treat your cataract or cataracts is when the loss of vision begins to impact your lifestyle and everyday activities. The decision to operate should be reached jointly by you and your eye doctor.

When Can You Have Cataract Surgery?

If you have cataracts in both eyes, your cataract surgeon will perform surgery on only one eye at a time. It is important to wait until one eye is healed before performing surgery on the second eye. That way you will still have vision during the healing process. The eye that underwent surgery will need to rest, and you will most likely wear an eye patch for at least a day. It can take two to three weeks before the eye heals completely and your vision returns to its new normal, which should be better than it was before the surgery.

The decision to undergo any form of surgery can be scary. The good news is cataract surgery is one of the most common types of surgery and has a 90% or greater success rate.

This e-book will guide you through the important steps you need to know when choosing a cataract surgeon and help you understand what to expect during surgery.

Each chapter will explore the questions you should ask prospective cataract surgeons, why these questions are important, and any information you may need to understand the doctors’ answers.
Introduction

We Will Cover:

1. How and where to find a cataract surgeon
2. Questions to ask in your search for the best cataract surgeon
3. Advanced lens options of cataract surgery
4. Benefits and risks of cataract surgery
5. What to expect after cataract surgery
Chapter 2: Finding a Cataract Surgeon

As with searching for any doctor, the best way to find a cataract surgeon is through word-of-mouth. Ask your optometrist or eye doctor for their recommendation. Also ask friends who may have had cataract surgery themselves or who have had family members undergo cataract surgery. Check testimonials on the cataract surgeon’s website and read other online reviews.

As you conduct your research, be sure to verify a surgeon’s credentials at the following places:

- The American Academy of Ophthalmology
- American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
- National Practitioner Data Bank
- Licensing boards for your state

As You Interview Doctors, Here Are Some Important Questions to Ask:

How many cataract surgeries have you done? What kind?
We can’t tell you how many surgeries is enough to make you feel comfortable, but the surgeon’s experience level should be substantial.

Also, keeping in mind, there are different types of lens implants which we will cover in the next chapter. If you are considering multifocal, accommodating, or other advanced lenses, you’ll want to find a doctor who has performed many of these surgeries.
What percentage of your patients experience eye infections? 
Has your center ever had an outbreak of eye infections?

Eye infections are a rare, but serious, complication of cataract surgery. Not all infections are the surgeon’s fault, since proper care is necessary after surgery to prevent discomfort as well as infection. However, outbreaks of infection affecting multiple patients can be a sign of unsanitary conditions and sub-standard surgery practices.

What happens during cataract surgery?
This is a question you’ll definitely want to ask, since the way the surgeon describes the procedure can help you gauge his/her level of knowledge and expertise. The cataract surgeon should be honest about the process, the time it will take, and how it will feel.

The gold standard of cataract surgery is microincision cataract surgery, also known as “no-stitch” surgery. It begins with a small incision in the periphery of the cornea. A tool with ultrasonic vibrations then breaks up, dissolves, and removes the cataract, a method called phacoemulsification. The surgeon inserts an intraocular lens (IOL) implant in its place.

Am I awake for the procedure?
What kind of anesthesia is used in cataract surgery?
To prevent pain or discomfort during the surgery, the cataract surgeon will provide numbing eye drops or a local anesthetic. Some surgeons may use injections to numb the eye and the area around it. The majority of cataract surgeons, however, offer mild anesthesia along with topical anesthetic eye drops, a technique pioneered by Kremer Eye Center in the 1990s. We believe this is preferable since it eliminates the bruising and soreness associated with injections. With this topical anesthesia process, you won’t need to stop taking blood thinners or aspirin if they are part of your daily regimen.

Is it an outpatient procedure?
The answer to this question will help you prepare for the time after surgery. In most cases, cataract surgery should be an outpatient procedure, but you’ll need someone to drive you home after surgery.
Chapter 3: *Determining the Intraocular Lens (IOL) That’s Best for You*

While you’re going through the process of deciding on a cataract surgeon, you’ll also be determining which type of cataract replacement lens (IOL) is best for your lifestyle, needs, and budget.

Here are the questions to ask the cataract surgeon so, together, you can make an informed decision.

**What are my options for a lens implant (IOL)?**

A monofocal IOL is the standard lens implant and provides sharp distance vision. Your doctor will determine the “power” of the lens needed (similar to the way the lens in your glasses has a “power” or corrective strength) using a special algorithm.

A toric IOL is an advanced IOL that is specially designed for people with corneal astigmatism. It manipulates the light in such a way as to resolve the distortion caused by the astigmatism.

A multifocal IOL and an accommodating IOL are two other advanced lens implants, with the shared goal of providing a range of vision, from near to far. There are a variety of lenses available, each with its own unique design, and therefore the effectiveness of each differs. Besides good distance vision, certain multifocal and accommodating lenses provide better near vision, while others provide better intermediate (computer) vision. Your cataract surgeon should evaluate your visual needs, lifestyle, and expectations, and help you decide on the right lens implant.

**What type of lens do you recommend?**

Your cataract surgeon should only answer after an in-depth exam. He/she should provide a recommendation and set reasonable expectations for after the lens is implanted. This should help you decide which type of lens implants will improve your vision and fit your lifestyle the best.
Is there an additional cost for the advanced lens?
Generally speaking, cataract surgery with a monofocal IOL lens implant is covered by the majority of insurance plans. Many insurances do not consider the advanced lenses (toric, multifocal, and accommodating) to be medically necessary. If you decide to have one of these advanced lenses implanted, ask your surgeon’s office for specific payment details. Often, patients pay out-of-pocket for the cost difference between the monofocal and advanced lens implants.

Chapter 4: Risks and Benefits of Cataract Surgery

As with any surgery, it’s important to understand the risks before you undergo cataract surgery. Here are a few questions to ask so you can make sure you understand the potential risks and possible outcomes following cataract surgery.

What are the risks of cataract surgery?
What are the odds of encountering any of these side effects?
Some of the risks of cataract surgery include infection, cystoid macular edema (a swelling of the central retina), or retinal detachment. Swelling usually goes away on its own but, if not, it can usually be treated with eye drops.

Only about one percent of people who undergo cataract surgery experience retinal detachment. It is most common in people who are extremely nearsighted, have a family history of the problem, or who experience trauma to the eye.

Your cataract surgeon should be straightforward about these potential risks and complications. You should also ask for an explanation on how they work to minimize these risks and if any of their patients have experienced any adverse side effects.

What happens if I develop secondary cataracts?
Secondary cataracts (also called after-cataracts) occur in about 30% of cataract patients who have been treated with cataract replacement surgery. If this occurs, your eye doctor may perform a YAG laser capsulotomy, a simple, five-minute outpatient procedure that eliminates the problem by using a laser to make a tiny hole in the remaining lens capsule to let light pass through.

The development of secondary cataracts is not a sign that your cataract surgeon did a poor job. It is a common side effect that is easily treated if it develops.
Can you treat other vision problems at the same time you get rid of cataracts?

In most cases, common vision conditions including astigmatism, presbyopia, nearsightedness, and farsightedness are corrected with the new lens implant. Today’s vision technology has advanced to the point that many cataract surgeons can also treat glaucoma and other problems. If this is important to you, be sure to ask your surgeon about your options.

What type of follow-up visits can I expect?

Your cataract surgeon should provide you with specific, clear directions for the days and weeks after your surgery. Most surgeons will want to see you for follow-up visits one day after the surgery, one week, three to four weeks, six to eight weeks, and again at six months after surgery.

Will I need glasses or contact lenses after my cataract surgery?

If you choose traditional monofocal IOLs, the answer is almost certainly, yes. These lenses have only one vision distance (far, intermediate, or near), so typically patients will need eyeglasses for either reading or distance.

Additionally, if you were nearsighted or had astigmatism prior to cataract surgery, you may still need glasses to correct these problems. But, be aware that your prescription may change.

If you opt for advanced or premium lenses, it is possible you won’t need corrective lenses after your cataract surgery. Your cataract surgeon should be honest with you, sharing success stories of patients who don’t need any glasses at all following cataract surgery, but also pointing out that this is not the case for everyone.

Be skeptical of a doctor who guarantees 20/20 or better vision. Look for someone who can show a high percentage of successful surgeries where patients who receive advanced lenses don’t need glasses or contacts after cataract surgery.

With premium lenses implanted during cataract surgery, it’s entirely possible you won’t need corrective lenses at all once your eyes heal and your vision stabilizes after just a few weeks.