



## Turning a blind eye



Ancient doctors, captivated by the white pearly appearance of a cataract called it *motia* or pearl. Even today, misconceptions abound over the clouding of the lens of the eye

Dr Cyres Mehta



**Myth: Cataract occurs only in old people**

**Fact:** Cataract can occur at any age. Cataract can occur in newborn babies due to infections like rubella that the mother can contract while the baby is in the womb and in infancy due to metabolic disorders like galactosemia. Taking medicines like steroids for other diseases, undergoing radiation for cancer and working in a steel mill where the eye is exposed to infrared rays can all cause cataracts. Finally any blow to the eye usually results in cataract

**Myth: Is cataract white water or a pearl?**

**Fact:** Cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye. The protein in the lens coagulates and denatures just like clear egg white, which becomes white when exposed to heat. Captivated by the white pearly appearance of the lens, ancient doctors named this *motia* or pearl. Incidentally the Arabic word for cataract is ancient as well and is *Mai Abiyat* or white water an accurate description.

**Myth: Cataract can be cured by eye drops**

**Fact:** Cataracts are caused by an irreversible chemical reaction that can only be treated by surgery. From time to time to make a quick buck, non-medical practitioners float the idea of miracle eye drops, which will dissolve the cataract. They put dilating drops in the eye, which increases the amount of light entering the eye. The person sees marginally better for a few hours in some cases. By then the 'doctor' has moved on.

**Myth: Cataract operations should not be done in summer**

**Fact:** In the past, after a cataract operation the patient's head was immobilized and he was not allowed to turn or move for a month. Summer was a bad season for the operation as the patient could not take a bath for a month. Today the cataract can be removed through an incision as small as 0.7 mm, the person is mobile instantly, and goes home in two hours wearing spectacles. Therefore the summer ban does not apply.

**Myth: I will get a big painful injection before surgery?**

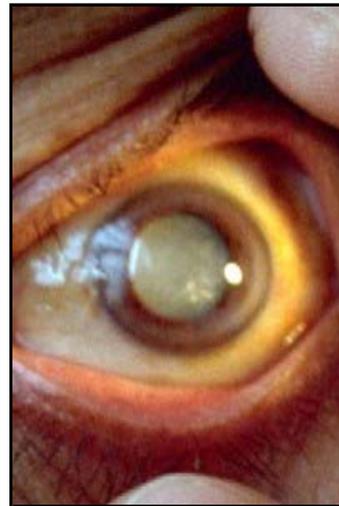
**Fact:** Modern centres do not use local anaesthesia to 'deaden' the eye. Eye drops are used and the patient feels no pain and only a little pressure at times.

**Myth: I don't need a lens**

**Fact:** The lens implant is an important step in a cataract surgery. Without a lens, a patient would go from a cataract blind person into a bespectacled blind person.

**Myth: The lens put in the eye has to be removed / replaced**

**Fact:** The lens is injected into the eye through a 2 mm tunnel, which seals instantly and needs no stitches. It is made of acrylic plastic which does not react with the body and theoretically should last much longer than the patient. Lenses implanted even 30 years ago show no sign of aging.

**Myth: I will have to wear spectacles for reading after surgery**

**Fact:** Modern lenses can be of multifocal design. These allow the patient to be spectacle independent and not have to wear spectacles for reading. The catch is the cost which the insurance policy may not cover.

**Myth: I will have to be housebound for a month**

**Fact:** As the small opening seals instantly, the person can go back to normal life, drive the next day and after four days can even go for a run. The period of rest depends from case to case and is best decided by the treating surgeon.

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