

# Myths And Fallacies -- Cataracts And Cataract Surgery

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*In the course of my practice and since this column has been well received over the last 2 months ive decided to answer some of the common questions patients and readers have posed to me.*

1) Cataract occurs only in old people?

NO -

- Cataract can occur at any age! Cataract can occur in newborn babies as well due to infections like rubella 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 cataract. Finally any blow to the eye usually results in cataract.

2) What is cataract? Is it white water or a pearl? If not then why is it called a Motia.

- Cataract is nothing but clouding of the lens in the eye. The protein in the human lens (just like a camera lens) coagulates

and denatures. A good example is 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 or cataract is ancient as well and is "Mai Abiyat" or white water an accurate description.

3) Cataract can be cured by eyedrops?

- From time to time to make a quick buck, non medical practitioners float the idea of miracle eyedrops which will dissolve the cataract. They put dilating drops in the eye which allows more light to enter the eye. The person sees marginally better for a few hours in some cases. By then the so called "doctor" has moved on. The truth is that its an irreversible chemical reaction that can only be treated by surgery. Even today research is on to find the miracle eyedrop that will prevent it!

4) Cataract operations should not be done in summer?

This is one of the most common myths related to

eye surgery!

- In the old days after a cataract operation the patients head was immobilized between sandbags and he was not allowed to turn or move for a month even to go to the toilet!. Naturally summer was a bad idea 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 2 hours wearing spectacles. No more is the summer ban valid.

5) I will get a big painful injection before surgery?

This is one of the biggest fears patients have. The thought of a 2 inch long needle in the eye socket is very frightening.

- The reality is that today modern centers no longer deaden the eye with local anaesthesia. Simply eye drops are put on he eye and the patients is conscious during surgery, and feels no pain only a little pressure at times. In selected cases injection is given to deaden the area around

the eye but the needle is very fine and the patient usually feels only a small prick in the skin.

6) I don't need a lens implant in the eye?

Thankfully eye surgeons today don't hear this statement much. However even as far back as 1990 everyone would ask this question.

- Performing a cataract surgery today without a lens means that we have converted a cataract blind person into a spectacle blind person. Doing the surgery without the appropriate lens implant is like doing a knee replacement without the prosthesis. Today lens implant is performed in 100% of cataract surgeries even in small towns.

7) Will the lens put in the eye have to be removed? Will it break or get bad?

- The lenses today are injected into the eye through a one to two mm tunnel which seals instantly and needs no stitches. The lenses are made of acrylic plastic which does not react with the body and theoretically should last much longer

than the patient. Lenses implanted even 40 years ago show no sign of aging.

8) I will have to wear spectacles for reading after surgery?

- Modern lenses can be of multifocal design. These allow the patient to be spectacle independant and not have to wear spectacles for reading. The catch is the cost which mostly insurance does not pay!

8) I will have to be housebound for a month?? When can I cook is one of the the most common questions asked today.

- As the small opening seals instantly, the person can go back to normal life, drive the next day and after 4 days can even go for a run. This naturally depends from case to case and is best decided by the treating surgeon.

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