

Intraocular Lens

What is an intraocular lens?

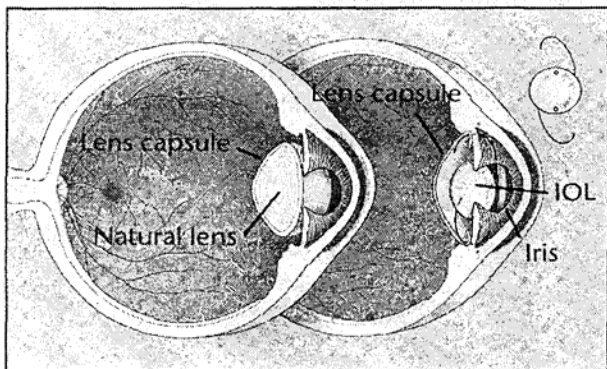
An intraocular lens, commonly called an IOL, is a tiny, lightweight, clear-plastic disk which is placed in the eye during cataract surgery to replace the eye's natural lens.

Why is the eye's natural lens removed during cataract surgery?

The eye's normally clear natural lens allows light to pass through it and focus on the retina. When a cataract forms, the lens becomes cloudy and light can no longer pass freely through it. The only way to remove the cataract is to remove the lens itself.

Can I see without a lens?

No, the eye cannot focus properly without a lens. To restore focusing power after cataract surgery, cataract glasses, a contact lens or an intraocular lens must be substituted. Rarely, an IOL cannot be inserted, but at least 95% of the people who have cataract surgery have an intraocular lens implant.



Cross section of eye with natural lens and intraocular lens implant.

What are the advantages of an intraocular lens implant?

Unlike contact lenses, which must be removed daily or periodically for cleaning, an intraocular lens implant is permanent. And, unlike cataract glasses which magnify images, an IOL produces a normally-sized and shaped image on the retina, replacing the focusing power of the natural lens more closely than either cataract glasses or contact lenses.

Are there any risks?

Today's implants are quite safe. Complications associated with the implantation of the lens itself are unlikely. Intraocular lenses must pass a thorough approval process before they can be widely used. Most importantly, the benefit of an IOL outweighs the small added risk of its implantation.

With any surgery complications can occur. There is always a possibility of hemorrhage, infection, or vision loss during eye surgery. Your ophthalmologist will discuss potential complications with you.

How will an IOL affect my vision?

The IOL power is chosen according to measurements of the eye length, using an ultrasound machine (A-scan) and corneal curvature, using a keratometer. Usually, the power chosen gives good distance vision, but reading glasses may still be needed for close work.

The lens implant cannot improve vision lost from causes other than cataracts, such as retinal disease or glaucoma, but can make vision more natural and useful than if intraocular lenses were not used.

Where will the lens be placed?

An intraocular lens is usually centered within the pupil, either in front of or behind the iris. (The iris is a colored ring of tissue that surrounds the pupil and expands or contracts to adjust to varying degrees of light.)

By far, the most common placement site today is in the posterior chamber, where the eye's natural lens is located. When removing the clouded lens, your ophthalmologist will leave behind the lens' sack-like outer membrane or capsule. The intraocular lens is placed in the pocket formed by the emptied lens capsule.

Sometimes, especially in younger people, the capsule will heal with some haziness. If capsule haze or fibrosis develops, a laser is used to clear the central capsule behind the IOL.

Why are regular medical eye examinations important for everyone?

Eye disease can occur at any age. Many eye diseases do not cause symptoms until the disease has done damage. Since most blindness is preventable if diagnosed and treated early, regular medical examinations by an ophthalmologist are very important.

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