

Cataract Surgery

Introduction

We know that you are experiencing a long wait for your cataract operation, and we understand that this can be very difficult.

We have developed this advice and information to help support you whilst you wait. It is designed to help you manage your symptoms of reduced and blurred vision and provide information about what you should do if your symptoms do worsen.

This guide has been written by NHS experts in cataract surgery and draws on the latest information and advice about how best to support people waiting for your procedure.

It includes links to advice and information which you can click on if using online, and details about helplines and other supportive websites.

You can also download and print this support guide and share with you family, friends and carers.

Waiting for your cataract surgery

Please be reassured that although you are experiencing a long wait for your cataract surgery, this delay is unlikely to result in a higher risk of complications from surgery. The outcome of the surgery and your eyesight should be just as good as it would have been if there was no delay.

Measures to help whilst you are waiting

Lighting:

Cataracts reduce the amount of light that can enter your eye. Using a bright light source can allow more light to enter your eye and improve the contrast of what you are looking at, which may help you see better. For example, use bright LED task lights for reading directed onto your work rather than spotlights or large room lights. Try and make the most of natural daylight in your home by fully opening curtains and you may find it easier to see things if you sit with your back to the window rather than facing the window. Where there is little natural light, it is often helpful to have a bright lamp behind you, shining the light over your shoulder onto your reading material.

Glare:

Cataracts may also scatter the light entering your eye causing symptoms of glare (difficulty seeing or discomfort with bright lights) and giving the effect of haloes and rays around lights. This can occur in environments away from home like supermarkets where lighting is very bright or on a very sunny day. It may also cause difficulty with driving at night because of glare from car headlights or street lamps. In bright light situations, you may find that tinted glasses, sunglasses or wraparound sunglasses help – also a hat with a brim or a sun visor to protect from bright overhead lights. At home, controlling light coming into your home with vertical blinds at the windows can be very helpful.

For more support and information on light sensitivity, please visit the following resources provided by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB):
<https://www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/eye-conditions-az/light-sensitivity-photophobia/>

Magnification and visual aids:

Your optometrist can advise and support you whilst you wait for your operation and advise whether new glasses or visual aids might help. In some cases, an up-to-date glasses prescription may be able to improve the vision whilst waiting although these would need to be changed once you have had your cataract operation.

There are many types of magnifiers available, ones you can hold, ones that you wear as spectacles and ones on a stand, some with in-built lights. These are available from your local optician or online to help you see, especially for close up tasks. It is important to try a magnifier before you purchase it as different magnifiers suit different people. A referral can be made to your local Low Vision clinic where you may borrow a magnifier.

Computer screens, tablet computers and mobile phones can have the text enlarged in the accessibility settings, the brightness and contrast can also be adjusted and, on tablets and smart phones, you can “zoom in” to enlarge images and text. Some computers and phones allow apps which provide a text to speech function so that the text is “read out” by the device. Many people find it easier, because of these various functions, to use screens for reading rather than books or paper versions.

There are many talking books services (e.g. [support from the RNIB](#)) available and large print correspondence can be requested from your service providers.

TV Audio Description:

Audio description can be enabled on many televisions, and it provides a description of what is happening on screen that may be missed if your vision is impaired. As for phones and computers, contrast and brightness settings may help visibility.
<https://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-home-and-leisure-television-radio-and-film/audio-description>

Safe and familiar home environment

We tend to be familiar with where furniture is and the layout of our own homes. It is important to ensure that any possible sources of trips and falls such as narrow spaces between items of furniture, uneven surfaces, rugs and items placed in unexpected areas are identified and addressed as this will make your home environment safer.

Changes in the home, such as changing lighting, colour schemes with good contrast and putting white or yellow marks or tape on the edges of steps or onto dials and switches, can also help. Charities such as local sight loss charities and the RNIB can provide other devices for those with reduction in vision such as large-button phones.

[Starting Out - Making The Most Of Your Sight | RNIB](https://www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions/cataracts)

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Driving

The legal requirement for driving a car is to be able to read a car registration plate from 20 meters away with either glasses or contact lenses. You should check with your optometrist whether your vision still reaches the standard required for driving. If not, you should notify the DVLA and stop driving. Importantly, you would be driving without insurance if you do not notify the DVLA. If your eyesight is causing you difficulty with driving due to glare either in bright sunshine or at night from headlights, you should refrain from driving until after your cataract operation.

Healthy living:

Cataracts do tend to get worse over time, but the speed at which they change can be very variable. You can help slow down the progression of your cataracts by looking after your general health. Quitting smoking and drinking less alcohol can help protect your eyes from worsening cataracts, as can a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruit and vegetables.

- NHS alcohol advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/>
- NHS quit smoking support: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/>
- NHS eat well support: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

What should I do if my eyesight is getting worse?

Cataracts are painless and cause a persistent gradual deterioration in vision. If your eyesight is gradually deteriorating and interfering with safe daily living, this may be due to your cataract getting worse. If your vision has significantly deteriorated from when you were first assessed or referred, particularly if this is affecting your ability to continue working, caring for others or independent safe living, or driving please contact your optometrist or your GP. They can assess and potentially contact your local ophthalmology (eye) department to request that your appointment or operation is expedited if your situation is unsafe.

If your eyesight deteriorates very suddenly or you are experiencing pain in or around your eye, this is unlikely to be due to cataract and you should seek an urgent appointment with your GP, local optometrist or ophthalmology department or contact NHS 111. In many areas there is direct access to optometrists for urgent eye care services which should be used as the first point of contact in places where this service exists.

Where can I find additional information?

Some people find it useful to speak to others with cataracts. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) provides a helpline (0303 123 9999) which can also be reached by email (helpline@rnib.org.uk). There is also the RNIB Connect online community that is free to join where you would be able to meet other people with sight loss and share experiences.

Many hospitals who offer cataract surgery provide patient information leaflets on cataract and cataract operations on their own websites.

Useful websites

- Royal College of Ophthalmologists: <https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-booklets/>
- Royal National Institute of Blind People: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions/cataracts>
- NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cataract-surgery/>