



DECISION AID

Cataracts:

Operate or wait and see?

A cataract is an eye condition in which the lens of the eye becomes cloudy. This causes your vision to get worse. Things become increasingly blurry and out of focus, making it especially difficult to see fine details clearly. Spatial vision is affected, too. Some people's vision is only slightly affected, whereas others might lose their eyesight very quickly. Without treatment, cataracts can result in blindness.

Surgery is the only way to get rid of cataracts. But you can also wait and use vision aids (like glasses or contact lenses) to help you see better for a while.

The aim of this decision aid is to help you decide together with your doctors whether or not to have surgery.

THESE ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS:

- “Wait-and-see” approach** — Glasses or contact lenses can help you to see better at first.
- Surgery** — The clouded lens is removed and replaced with an artificial lens.

You can read about the pros and cons of these treatments on the next few pages.

MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION

This decision aid probably won't include all of the information that you need. It is still important to talk to a doctor, but the decision aid can help you. Your treatment decision will depend on personal factors too. For example, how much the cataracts affect you in everyday life or whether you have any other (eye) conditions that could influence the outcome of the surgery. Possible relevant eye conditions include glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration.



Even if you find your symptoms very distressing: Take the time to find out what you want to know and don't let anyone pressure you into choosing a certain treatment.

PROS AND CONS OF THE TREATMENT OPTIONS

	“Wait-and-see” approach	Surgery
What does the treatment involve?	<p>You wait and do not have surgery. Instead, you can improve your vision with glasses or contact lenses.</p> <p>Here it’s a good idea to have your eyes checked regularly by a doctor. You can decide to have surgery at any time.</p>	<p>The surgeon uses a scalpel to make a small cut at the edge of the cornea (the clear covering of the eye). They then remove the clouded lens and replace it with a new, artificial lens. This procedure is called phacoemulsification.</p> <p>The procedure takes about 30 minutes and you can usually go home on the same day. It is done using a local anesthetic.</p>
Who is the treatment suitable for?	For most people with cataracts.	For most people with cataracts.
How much can the treatment help?	Glasses or contact lenses can help you to see better for a while. But cataracts usually cause your eyesight to get worse over time. Then glasses or contact lenses might no longer help enough.	About 9 out of 10 people can see better after surgery than before. “Better” means sharper and seeing more contrast. You can see near and far away objects better again, and you can see more in dim light. The artificial lens can usually stay in your eye for the rest of your life. Depending on the type of lens, you may also need reading glasses after the operation.
What are the possible disadvantages of the treatment?	The “wait-and-see” approach usually has no immediate disadvantages – unless glasses or contact lenses don’t help enough, or the increasing glare from light sources at dusk and at night makes it dangerous to drive. What’s more, cataracts often make your eyesight worse over time – and surgery is more difficult if the cataract is already very advanced.	Cataract surgery does not usually cause complications. Around 5 out of 100 operations result in infections, injuries, bleeding or wound-healing problems. Most complications do not have any long-term consequences, but they can lead to temporary problems such as impaired vision or slower wound healing.

Some doctors offer to do the operation using a laser to cut out the lens (femtosecond laser). Laser-assisted cataract surgery has no health-related advantages. The procedure with a scalpel is just as safe and effective. But laser-assisted surgery is more expensive and you usually have to cover the extra costs yourself.

YOUR DECISION

You can now weigh the pros and cons of the different treatments for yourself. Which of them are better suited to you and your life circumstances, and which of them aren't?

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

You can use this table to note the main issues for you when considering the options. Which of them will affect your decision? How important are they to you? Mark the statements that apply to you, and add any thoughts of your own. Ranking the statements could help: For instance, you could mark the statements that are especially important to you with a 1, those that are a little less important with a 2, and so on.

Which statements apply to you?		Ranking (1, 2, ...)
My eyesight has become so bad that it really affects me in daily life.	<input type="radio"/>	
I use vision aids (e.g. glasses or contact lenses) and get on well with them.	<input type="radio"/>	
I can't see well enough with vision aids.	<input type="radio"/>	
I'm worried that surgery will lead to complications.	<input type="radio"/>	
I'm not really worried about surgery.	<input type="radio"/>	
	<input type="radio"/>	

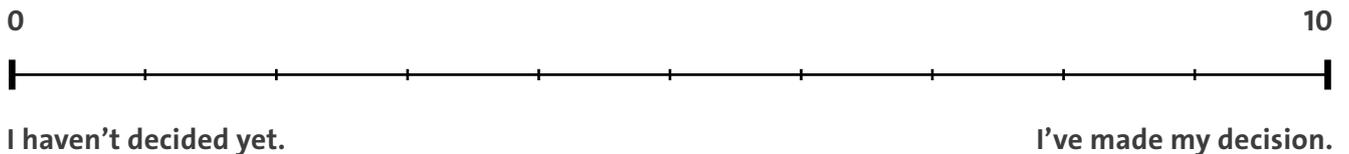
WHICH TREATMENT WOULD YOU CONSIDER?

You can use this table to assess the different treatments. Mark the ones you would consider and write down what you like and don't like about them.

Which treatment would you consider?		What do you like about it?	What don't you like about it?
“Wait-and-see” approach	<input type="radio"/>		
Surgery	<input type="radio"/>		

HOW FAR HAVE YOU GOT WITH YOUR DECISION?

You can use this section to record how far along you are in your decision-making process. Mark where you are on a scale of 0 to 10.



If you still aren't sure and need more help, you can find some tips and more information on the following pages.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED IN ORDER TO MAKE A DECISION?

If you still can't decide, the following might help:

Knowledge If you feel that you don't have enough information:	<input type="checkbox"/> Write down any questions you still have (see below). <input type="checkbox"/> Take this decision aid and your list of questions along to your next appointment and talk about them with your doctor. <input type="checkbox"/> Get more information (for example, on the internet) but make sure your sources are reliable! <input type="checkbox"/> Get a second medical opinion.
Support If you feel you need more support:	<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss the various options with a trusted person (for instance, with your doctor, someone in your family, or a friend). <input type="checkbox"/> Contact patient advice services or a support group. You will find more information about this on the next page. <input type="checkbox"/> Seek help to support your choice (like financial support, childcare, transport for appointments, or someone to go with you).

PREPARING FOR THE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT

Do you still have any questions or concerns? Write down your questions or your own thoughts to discuss with the doctor.

There's a list of possible questions here:

informedhealth.org/questions

YOU WILL FIND IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ABOUT THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ON THE INTERNET:

	Cataracts and the treatment options informedhealth.org/cataracts.html
	Surgery informedhealth.org/surgery.html
	Patient advice services and support groups informedhealth.org/support-groups-and-information-centers



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany)

www.informedhealth.org/about-us

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The format of this decision aid is based on the following:

- Ottawa Personal Decision Guide. O'Connor, Stacey, Jacobsen 2012. Ottawa Hospital Research Institute and University of Ottawa, Canada.
- MAKING SDM A REALITY – Hospital-wide shared decision making – G-BA Innovation fund 2023.
- Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany). Development of a decision aid for hysterectomy: Rapid Report; Commission P18-01. 2019.