

Keep Your Eyes on Your Eyes

June is Cataract Awareness Month

Of all of our five senses, the one that many people hold most dear is the gift of sight. The ability to watch our children and grandchildren grow, to marvel at the majesty of a sunset and to enjoy our favorite movie are some of life's most precious rewards. But as we get older our eyes get older too which is what makes June's Cataract Awareness Month so important.

A cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens, which blocks or changes the passage of light into the eye. When this happens, vision may become blurry or dim. More importantly, cataracts are the world's leading cause of blindness. In the United States alone, more than 25 million Americans are estimated to have cataract and, as the population in America continues to age, the number of cataract cases are projected to increase by 50 percent to 38.5 million by 2032.

Because a cataract does not generally cause pain, redness or tears it is important to be on guard for its symptoms. These include:

- Decreasing vision with age
- Blurred or double vision
- Seeing halos around bright lights
- Difficulty distinguishing colors
- Frequent prescription changes for glasses
- Difficulty reading

While age is the most common reason for cataracts (and a natural result of aging) there are other risk factors that can contribute to the development of cataracts including certain hereditary and physical traits, along with certain lifestyle habits. Among these are:

- Intense heat or long-term exposure to UV rays from the sun
- Certain diseases, such as diabetes

- Inflammation in the eye
- Hereditary influences
- Events before birth, such as German measles in the mother
- Long-term steroid use
- Eye injuries
- Eye diseases
- Smoking

Fortunately, surgical procedures to remove cataracts have evolved considerably and can literally restore vision, within minutes (typically under 30 minutes) with a fast, minor and virtually pain-free procedure. In fact, because cataracts are so common, and because the issue can be easily treated at a very high success rate, cataract surgery has become the most commonly performed surgery in the U.S. each year.

In cataract surgery the natural lens of the eye is removed and replaced with an artificial intraocular lens which allows the patient to see clearly again. In addition to improving vision, cataract surgery has also been shown to improve quality of life. And better vision means you can get back to doing the things you love and have to worry less that poor sight could contribute to a devastating fall.

To make sure cataracts don't affect your vision, let Cataract Awareness Month be your reminder to get regular eye exams and to watch for the warning signs. Doing so is the best way to make sure that you will be able to see clearly today and in the years to come.

