

From Drs. Fine, Hoffman, & Packer

CATARACT GLASSES

Cataract removal is actually the surgical removal of the eye's natural lens after it has become cloudy. Without that lens, you will need some optical power to replace what was lost, or else everything you see will be out of focus. Cataract glasses can supply the power to correct the focus and permit clear vision, but your vision with them will not be quite like it was before. It will take an effort to get used to the new glasses.

Adapting to cataract glasses may be slow, but the end result is well worth it. It is natural to have moments of frustration and even despair, but keep reminding yourself that hundreds of thousands of others have gone through the same process and have been rewarded with good, usable vision.

Why Is Adapting Difficult?

Cataract glasses are so powerful they act like low-powered telescopes and make everything look larger than normal (about 25% larger). Because they magnify, they distort your perception of distance. The ground, for example, will look much closer than it actually is. Also, the glasses reduce and distort your side vision. You will have to be especially careful when driving a car because objects at the side that you didn't see - that didn't seem to be there before - can appear suddenly in your path. All of this can be annoying and discouraging, but you will eventually adapt and enjoy your "new" sight.

How To Make Adjustment Easier

1. Do not insist on loosely fitting glasses. To give good vision, your glasses should fit fairly close to your eyes and you should feel the frame pressing slightly on your nose and ears. In time you will become comfortable with this tighter fit. Return to your optician as often as necessary to have the glasses adjusted.

2. Do not "yank" off your glasses. Always remove your glasses carefully with both hands. Do not casually pull them off your face with one hand, as this can bend the frame and prevent the glasses from fitting properly and providing you with sharp vision.

3. Don't keep taking your glasses off. Some people think that removing their glasses frequently will help them adjust to them better or faster. That isn't true. The best way to shorten your adjustment time is to put the glasses on and wear them constantly, until bedtime.

4. Don't be afraid to walk around. The optical power of the glasses makes everything appear larger than actual size and closer to you than it really is. In reaching for an object, you may misjudge its distance and grasp for it too soon. In stepping off a curb, you may step too soon. Don't be fearful. In time, your brain will help you adjust; things will eventually appear normal, and you will be able to walk about comfortably and confidently again.

5. Don't be afraid of doorways. When viewed from a distance, straight lines and rectangular objects may appear slightly distorted. The sides of doorways might seem to bow inwards in the middle. Don't let that stop you - simply look through the center of the opening and continue walking. As you get closer, the doorway will gradually assume its normal shape. With time, this problem gets much easier to manage.

6. Don't flick your eyes from side to side. To look to the side, learn to turn your head and look through the center of the lenses instead of moving your eyes and looking through the edges. If you move your eyes when looking to the side, as you did before the surgery, you may get an uncomfortable "swimming" sensation and may find it hard to keep your balance.

7. Move your head in slow motion. When looking to the side, turn your head slowly. Since cataract glasses magnify everything, rapid rotation of your head may cause an uncomfortable dizzy feeling of things going by too fast.

8. Don't be startled by moving objects. Your cataract glasses create a small area of side vision that is invisible - "optically blind." A moving object at your side, such as a person walking across the room, may suddenly disappear and then re-appear in your field of vision like a jack-in-the-box. You can avoid being startled if you simply learn to turn your head to look to the side.

9. Be careful crossing streets. You could step off a curb and find yourself in the path of a car you did not see. This will not happen if you get into the habit of turning your head slowly in both directions. The same applies to boarding buses or subway trains. After a while, moving your head will become second nature to you.