

From Drs. Fine, Hoffman, & Packer

INTRAOCULAR LENS IMPLANT (IOL)

An intraocular lens implant (IOL) is a tiny piece of lens-shaped plastic that replaces your natural lens after a cataract operation. The specific lens type and power selected for you depends on your personal visual requirements. That IOL is permanently implanted when your cloudy lens (cataract) is removed and requires no care. You cannot feel it or see it and it is not noticed by others. Almost all cataract surgery patients now choose to have their cataracts replaced by an IOL.

What Are the Advantages of an IOL?

An IOL is a "miracle" answer to seeing well after cataract removal. Because it lies in nearly the same position that your eye's natural lens did before it was removed, it replaces the optical power of your natural lens very closely. You will see images that are normal in size and shape, and your depth perception and side vision are likely to be very natural.

A new multifocal IOL is now available that could permanently eliminate the need for reading glasses. But it has both advantages and disadvantages. If you are interested, you should learn all you can about it.

Are There Risks?

Aside from the rare complications that can occur with any type of cataract surgery, there is a very slight additional risk that the IOL can become displaced. But the odds are overwhelming that everything will be fine.

Some people wonder if the lens can move around inside their eye. Usually it doesn't move. It becomes fixed into position by a fine network of scar tissue that forms over time, or by sutures. Do not worry about your body rejecting the implant lens. Rejection shouldn't happen because the lens is made from an inert material that the body does not treat as foreign and therefore does not reject.

Can Everyone Have an IOL Implanted?

Lens implants can provide the best vision possible after cataract removal, but they cannot be used for every cataract patient. Implants may actually be unsafe to use if the interior of the eye is chronically inflamed or if certain diseases are present that affect the eye. If you cannot have an IOL, there are other options: thick cataract eyeglasses and contact lenses. (Until about 25 years ago, these were the only options for correcting vision after cataract surgery.)

After IOL Surgery

Vision usually improves quickly (within days), and you may be surprised at how good it is. It won't become stable, however, for about 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. At that time, ordinary eyeglasses (not cataract glasses) can be fitted to give you your best correction for distance vision and for reading.

No surgical results can ever be guaranteed. Your vision after surgery will likely be fine but it will depend a lot on the basic health of the eye. (If you have retina or glaucoma problems, for example, vision may not be perfect even though the surgery is successful.) To help determine the health of your eye before cataract surgery, several tests will be made. If there is any problem or disease present, you will be told about your condition so that your expectations about the visual outcome after the surgery can be realistic.