What are cataracts?
A cataract is a clouding of the eye’s lens. Normally, the lens is clear. It focuses light onto the retina at the back of the eye, which sends images to the brain.

A cataract blocks light needed for sight. Your vision may become blurry or dim because light can’t pass properly through the lens to the retina.

Cataract risk factors
The exact cause of cataracts is unknown. Most often, a cataract is part of getting older. These factors may also play a role:

- Intense heat or long-term exposure to UV rays from the sun
- Inflammation in the eye
- Hereditary influences
- Events before birth, such as German measles in the mother
- Long-term steroid use
- Eye injuries
- Eye diseases
- Certain other diseases, such as diabetes
- Smoking

How can I tell if I have a cataract?
A cataract generally does not cause pain, redness or tears. However, these changes in your vision may be signs of a cataract:

- Blurred vision, double vision, ghost images, the sense of a “film” over the eyes.
- Lights seem too dim for reading or close-up work, or you are “dazzled” by strong light.
- Changing eyeglass prescriptions often. The change may not seem to help your vision.

You may notice the cataract on your eye. It may look like a milky or yellowish spot in the pupil (the center of your eye is normally black). Problems seeing become more noticeable as cataracts develop. A cataract may develop quickly over months or slowly over years.

Is surgery the only treatment?
Yes. Cataracts cannot be treated with medicines. Eye drops or other drugs will not dissolve a cataract or slow its progress.

Cataract surgery
Surgery is the only proven treatment for cataract. It is a delicate operation. Yet, it is one of the safest operations done today. More than 95% of surgeries are successful. Fewer than 5% of cases have complications such as inflammation, bleeding, infection or retinal detachment.

How do I know I really need surgery?
Cataracts are a leading cause of blindness among older adults. Yet young people and even newborns can get cataracts. More than 20 million Americans age 40 and older have cataracts. More than half of all Americans have cataracts by the time they are 80 years old. The good news is that doctors can treat cataracts. Surgery restores sight in more than 95% of cases treated.