

## Driving when you have cataracts

---

- For most people, driving represents freedom, control and independence. Driving enables most people to get to the places they want to go and to see the people they want to see when they want.
- Driving is a complex skill. Our ability to drive safely can be challenged by changes in our physical, emotional and mental condition.
- The goal of this brochure is to help you, your family and your health care professional talk about how cataracts may affect your ability to drive safely.

## How can having cataracts affect my driving?

---

- Having a cataract can make it harder for you to see the road, street signs, other cars, and people walking because a cataract clouds the eye's lens. Among the signs of a cataract:
  - ◆ objects look blurry;
  - ◆ things are more difficult to see in bright light;
  - ◆ headlight glare is more intense;
  - ◆ colors look faded;
  - ◆ night vision is worse; and
  - ◆ double vision may be present.

- Having a cataract also can mean that you need to change your eyeglasses or contact lenses more often. If you have any of these symptoms, check with your eye care expert. Even a small change in your eyeglass prescription can make a big difference in seeing at the long distances required with driving.

## Can I still drive with a cataract?

---

- If your doctor has told you that you have a cataract, there are certain things that you should know and do to remain a safe driver.
- Every person's cataract is different. In its early stages, your cataract may be so small that it does not affect your vision. You may be able to drive safely for many years if you have no other serious medical problems. However, over time the cataract may worsen and cloud more of the lens of your eye. This can make your vision dull and blurry.
- It may become difficult to see and to drive safely if you have a cataract. You may need to plan car trips to avoid times when vision may be most affected; for example, driving west at dusk into a setting sun or during rainy conditions at night. Clean your car windshields (both inside and outside) often so vision is not reduced even further. You also should clean your automobile headlamps to provide as much light as possible for night driving.

## What can I do when cataracts affect my driving?

---

- Your eye care expert may recommend that you have cataract surgery depending upon the severity of your visual defect. Before deciding on surgery, your doctor may refer you to a specialist who may go on a drive with you to see how well you drive with your cataract.
- The specialist also may offer training that is able to improve your driving skills. Improving your skills could help keep you and others around you safe.
- To find a driver rehabilitation specialist near you, go to [www.aota.org/olderdriver](http://www.aota.org/olderdriver) and look up the name of a specialist in your State. Additionally, you can call hospitals and rehabilitation facilities to find an occupational therapist who can help with the driving skills assessment and remediation. Depending on where you live, you may need to travel to nearby communities to find these services.
- If you decide to have cataract surgery, your clouded lens will likely be replaced with a clear, artificial lens. With a new, clear lens, you will most likely be able to keep driving safely for many years to come. Cataract surgery is the most common surgical procedure in the United States and is usually done on an outpatient basis.

## What if I have to give up or cut back on driving?

- You can keep your independence even if you have to give up or cut back on your driving. It may take planning ahead on your part, but it will get you to the places you want to go and the people you want to see. Consider:
  - ◆ rides with family and friends;
  - ◆ taxi cabs;
  - ◆ shuttle buses or vans; and
  - ◆ public buses, trains and subways.
- Also, senior centers, religious and other local service groups often offer transportation services for older adults in your community.

## Who can I call for help with transportation?

- Call the ElderCare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 and ask for your local Office on Aging, or go to their website [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).
- Contact your regional transit authority, which can tell you which bus or train to take.
- Call Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation) at 1-800-659-6428 or go to their website [www.easterseals.com/transportation](http://www.easterseals.com/transportation).

## Where do I find out more about cataracts and their treatment?

- Your first step is to talk with your doctor and eye care expert. You also can contact the:

 American Optometric Association  
314-991-4100  
[www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org)

 American Academy of Ophthalmology  
415-561-8500  
[www.aao.org](http://www.aao.org)

 National Eye Institute  
301-496-5248  
[www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov)

- You also can get a copy of the “*Age Page On Older Drivers*” from the National Institute on Aging by calling 1-800-222-2225, or by going to their website at [www.niapublications.org/engagepages/drivers.asp](http://www.niapublications.org/engagepages/drivers.asp)

## Wear your safety belt

Always wear your safety belt when you are driving or riding in a car. Make sure that every person who is riding with you also is buckled up. Wear your safety belt even if your car has air bags.



U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety  
Administration



[www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov)  
**nhtsa**  
people saving people

# Driving When You Have Cataracts

