Cataracts

Patient Information Sheet

What is a cataract?
It is where the lens of the eye becomes cloudy, so it is difficult to see through.
You may find:
- things look cloudy or blurred
- bright lights dazzle
- you may see double in the affected eye.

What is the lens?
The lens is inside the eye directly behind the coloured part, which is called the iris. Little muscles are attached to the lens. These move, and by slightly altering its shape they help you focus on what you want to see.

What causes cataracts?
The most common cause is ageing, but occasionally they happen because of injury, or as a complication of other conditions.
Some symptoms:
- slight blurring of vision
- spectacles always seem to need cleaning
- seeing slightly double
- change of colour vision, becoming more yellow

- difficulty with glare and bright lights.

What can be done to help?
In the early stages of cataract, spectacles may help you see clearly enough.

Will I need an operation?
When your vision has become so poor that it seriously affects everyday life - such as driving, watching TV, or reading - then your optometrist will refer you to an eye specialist, called an ophthalmologist, in the hospital. The ophthalmologist will assess your eyes and help you decide about an operation.

What does the operation involve?
It is often carried out under local anaesthetic, and usually as a day-case procedure (no overnight stay).
The cloudy lens inside your eye is removed and replaced with a new, clear lens made of special plastic.
Afterwards, your vision is usually much better, unless there are other reasons for your poor sight besides the cataract.

St Helens and Knowsley Local Optical Committee
St Helens/Knowsley Primary Care Trust