

PRINT – As Restrictions Ease, Surgeons Focus on Cataract Procedures

It's classified as an elective surgery but anyone impacted by a cataract knows it can have a big impact on daily life. A cataract is a cloudy area in the lens of your eye that develops slowly over time and most are age-related. It can affect a person's ability to work, read, drive, or watch TV.

According to the National Eye Institute, more than four million cataract surgeries are done annually in the U.S., making it the most common elective surgery. COVID-19 put a temporary hold on cataract surgeries but with federal and state public health approval and guidance, OSF HealthCare has reignited many services, including cataract surgery, with extra safety protocols in place.

Dr. Edward Hu is an ophthalmologist who specializes in small-incision cataract surgery for the Illinois Eye Center and OSF HealthCare in Peoria, Washington and Kewanee, Illinois. He says in the past, patients would have to wait until they had advanced cataracts and their vision was extremely impaired before surgeons could safely replace the clouded lens that helps people focus their eyes. Dr. Hu says improved technology and safety protocols allow the procedure to be performed sooner.

"Because of the sophisticated testing that we do in preparation for the cataract surgeries, plus the advanced technologies we use to do the cataract surgery, have resulted in outstanding and very consistent outcomes."

Dr. Hu says patients now have more control in deciding when they want the procedure to insert a new replacement lens, also referred to as an [intraocular lens](#).

"The driving force for cataract surgery nowadays lies more in the patients' control in terms of when *they* feel their quality of vision is not good enough for what they enjoy and like to do in terms of activities of daily living."

Insurance can play a role because coverage is connected to a clinical diagnosis about advancement of the cataract. But, the decision to get the procedure is a little easier to make because it doesn't require sedation or stitches and takes about five minutes.

"You walk in and out the same day of surgery and you're doing all of the normal things you were doing before, right after, according to Dr. Hu. "You're on some medicine eye drops for about three to four weeks afterwards. We do a final vision check to determine whether the patient may or may not need new glasses or some kind of update in their glasses."

He added, "There are many different advanced technology lens implants these days which for certain patients might be able to get them out of glasses under certain circumstances or altogether."

Making sure patients are educated about their options and outcomes well in advance of cataract surgery is important. Most patients see better either the same day or the next with their new lens. In some cases following the procedure, patients will need to wear glasses for close-up activities such as reading or sewing.

If there are cataracts in both eyes that require surgery, Dr. Hu typically performs the surgery several weeks apart to allow patients the ability to keep up with daily activities.

Because of the COVID-19 virus, we are taking additional steps to address your safety and peace of mind for appointments, elective procedures-surgeries, and follow-up including:

- An even greater commitment to frequent cleaning and disinfecting
- Daily screening for all providers and staff to ensure they are symptom-free
- All visitors must wear masks unless they are under age two or have a medical condition preventing it
- Reduced wait times, shields and barriers to create physical distancing at check-in and in waiting rooms
- Patient prescreening before visits and more OSF MyChart use with an option for patients to self-schedule video visits

[Learn more](#) about cataracts and your options to address them.