

Secondary Cataracts

CLOUDY VISION CLEARED WITH LASER TREATMENT

Secondary cataracts occur months or years after successful cataract surgery in 10–35% of patients. People with this condition notice a return of cloudy or blurred vision that sometimes makes them wonder if their cataracts are coming back. The solution is an easy laser treatment.



WHAT IS A SECONDARY CATARACT?

Although cataracts cannot return once they are removed, tiny particles or cells of the original cataract can grow to form a film on the inside wall of the clear tissue bag that holds the new lens implant in place. As these cells grow, the thin, cellophane-like membrane becomes thick and cloudy like wax paper. Since this blocks and blurs light similar to a cataract, it is often called a secondary cataract. Other more technical terms for this condition are posterior capsule opacity or capsule opacity.

SYMPTOMS

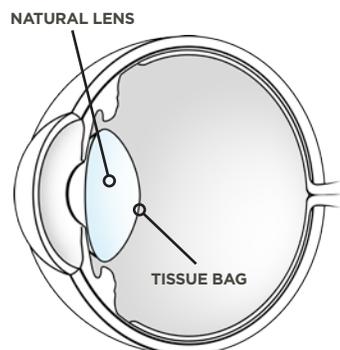
Treatment is only necessary if the cloudy membrane affects a person's vision and lifestyle. Symptoms can include:

- Blurry, milky or hazy vision
- Decreased vision and difficulty seeing at night
- Distortion or double vision
- Problems with glare and bright lights

YAG LASER TREATMENT

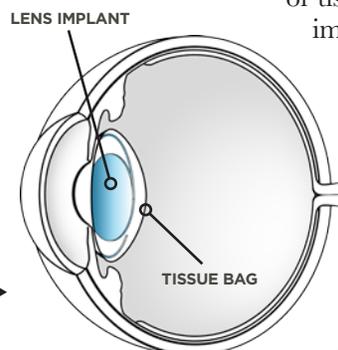
Secondary cataracts are treated with a procedure called YAG capsulotomy or YAG laser posterior capsulotomy—a long name for an easy treatment. YAG is the acronym for yttrium aluminum garnet—the elements that energize the laser beam.

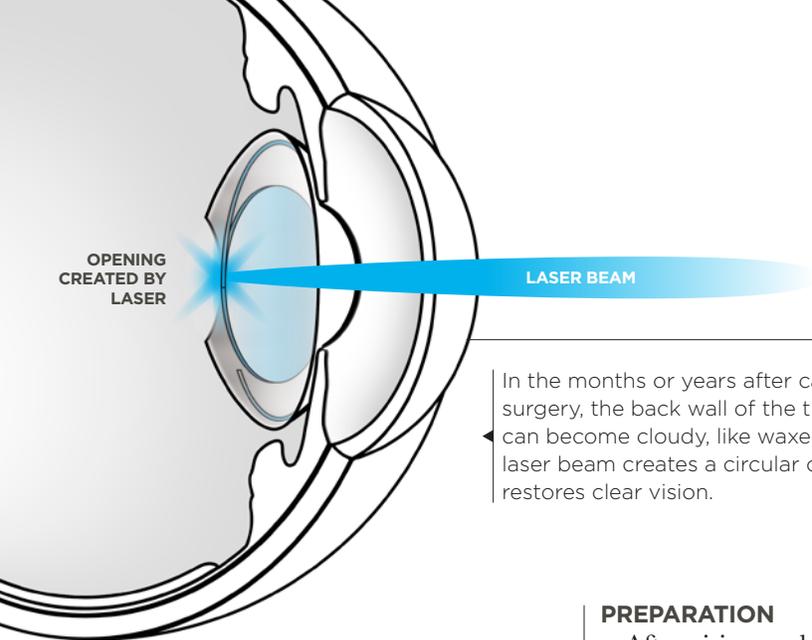
Treatment causes no discomfort. There is no incision or contact with the eye. The surgeon uses short pulses of laser energy to make a small hole in the lens capsule or tissue bag that holds the lens implant. This opening restores vision by allowing light to pass unobstructed to the back of the eye. Although the procedure requires precise focusing by the surgeon, treatment is painless, typically safe and effective, and can be accomplished in a doctor's office within a few minutes.



The eye's lens is enclosed by a clear tissue bag. You might think of it as cellophane or Saran Wrap. When the lens material inside the bag becomes clouded, it is called a cataract.

Cataract surgery removes the clouded lens material, leaving the tissue bag in place. The new artificial lens implant is then placed inside the bag.





In the months or years after cataract surgery, the back wall of the tissue bag can become cloudy, like waxed paper. The laser beam creates a circular opening that restores clear vision.

YAG laser treatment:

- Is painless
- Only takes a few minutes
- Clears vision instantly
- Can be done in an exam-room setting
- Heals fast
- Has no after-surgery restrictions
- Allows a quick return to good vision



PREPARATION

After vision and eye pressure are checked, eye drops are used to dilate the pupil. The YAG laser is attached to a microscope similar to the one used for eye exams, so patients sit comfortably on a chair with their head on the instrument's chin and forehead rests. The surgeon's assistant may put gentle pressure on the back of the patient's head to keep it in position so the eye remains as still as possible.

THE PROCEDURE

Using a special aiming beam, the surgeon focuses on the cloudy membrane inside the eye. When it is perfectly focused, the surgeon activates the laser. Its beam shines through the cornea and artificial lens implant without doing any harm, but makes tiny snapping sounds as it perforates the membrane and creates a hole. Repeated laser snaps make the opening large enough for light to pass through to the retina. There is no discomfort and the popping sounds are the only way patients know anything is happening. The procedure takes about 5 minutes and both eyes can be treated during the same visit.

RISKS

Complications are rare. The most common is a short-term increase of fluid pressure inside the eye, which is easily managed. Other risks include:

- Swelling or inflammation
- Floaters
- Damage to the lens implant
- Lens displacement
- Retinal breaks or detachment

AFTER TREATMENT

Vision may improve instantly or gradually clear over a few days. However, it will likely be blurry from the dilating eye drops so patients need someone to drive them home. Other than driving, usual activities may be resumed immediately.

Call your eye doctor immediately if you see or experience:

- Flashing lights in your vision
- A black shadow or curtain in your vision that you cannot see through
- An increase in floaters
- Eye pain

QUESTIONS

If you have questions about secondary cataracts or YAG laser treatment, talk with your optometric physician or call our office nearest you.

Pacific Cataract and Laser Institute
www.pcli.com

800-224-7254
800-557-7254 In Alaska



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