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IOI: Intraocular Lenses Explained

November 1, 2013



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Most everything in the body seems to have an artificial replacement available these days. Your eyes are no different. The natural lens inside an eye can be replaced by an intraocular lens, or IOL.

IOLs have been FDA approved since 1981. Today, doctors have a variety of IOLs they can implant, if a patient needs one.

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Why get an IOL?

One of the most common reasons for replacing the natural eye lens is to correct for cataracts. Cataracts typically develop after age 60, when a yellow cloudiness gradually blurs the natural lens. The change isn't overnight, but over time a patient's vision blurs.

Another, less common reason for having an IOL is to correct a refractive error or presbyopia (the age-related condition making reading difficult). Presbyopia results from decreasing flexibility of the natural lens, making focusing on near objects challenging. An IOL can provide a new lens to correct this.

Types of IOL

Like other vision-correction technologies, IOLs have improved over the years to a time when today, patients have many options.

It's common for a patient to get a distance-correcting IOL while continuing to use reading glasses for seeing up close. But an IOL can also correct for near-vision needs. Some IOLs filter UV rays, and future technology might be able to adjust an IOL prescription after it's been implanted. Patients can choose from among various lenses, but IOLs that correct for distance vision and more, such as presbyopia or astigmatism, are considered premium IOLs with higher costs to the patient.

Paying for IOLs

Medicaid, Medicare and most insurance plans cover cataract surgery because it's medically necessary. Premium IOL lenses, such as those that correct presbyopia or astigmatism, though, usually incur an out-of-pocket charge of a couple thousand dollars, above that of a standard IOL surgery cost. In other words, insurance typically pays for distance-vision IOLs, but if you want extra features (e.g., presbyopia or astigmatism correction too), you'll pay for those features yourself.

IOLs and LASIK

The most common need for IOLs—cataracts—sometimes shows up in a person considering LASIK during his or her LASIK consultation. If you'd like laser vision correction but are over the age of 60, your LASIK provider should be able to tell you at a LASIK consultation whether or not cataracts play a role in your candidacy.



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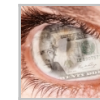
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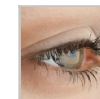
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