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Tuesday, June 16, 2020
guardian.co.tt

health 35



The life changing potential of cataract surgery

Cataract surgery has the potential to be life changing! June is dedicated to cataract awareness and its ability to drastically impact our lives. Cataracts are one of the most common eye conditions in Trinidad and Tobago's aging population.

According to the latest assessment, cataract is responsible for at least 51 per cent of world blindness. Although cataracts can be surgically removed, in many countries, T&T included, barriers exist that prevent patients to access surgery. These barriers are often lack of funding for corrective surgery, and sometimes it is just an over-subscription in an already burdened public health care system. Before reaching the stage of blindness however, many persons suffer from low vision and hence the impact of cataracts is a prolonged one.

A cataract is a clouding or loss of transparency in the lens of the eye usually due to aging. The lens is the clear part of the eye that helps focus light on the retina and in the normal eye, the light passes easily through the transparent lens. With cataracts however, the lens is cloudy and therefore the image you see becomes blurred.

What are the signs and symptoms of cataracts?

- Clouded, blurred or dim vision
- Increasing difficulty with vision at night

- Sensitivity to light and glare
- Need for brighter light for reading and other activities
- Seeing "halos" around lights
- Frequent changes in eyeglass or contact lens prescription
- Fading or yellowing of colours
- Double vision in a single eye

Why life changing?

Cataract surgery can simply change your life. This 10-12-minute surgery (not including pre-op preparation or short recovery after the surgery) done by your ophthalmologist is one of the most common and perfected surgeries in the world. During the surgery, your original and clouded

lens is removed and a clear synthetic lens or IOL (intraocular lens) is inserted. This surgery is an outpatient surgery so it means that you don't have to stay in the hospital after the surgery.

Recovering at home after surgery is relatively easy and with only a few simple restrictions. Your vision may be blurry after the surgery, but this is really just your body and brain getting used to your new IOL. With cataracts your brain would have adjusted to the impairment, so after the surgery it will need to "remember" how to see unobstructed. Within a couple weeks, your vision will greatly improve.

Having your cataracts removed can be a major turning point, especially if you've had to deal with them for a while. Over this time, you would have become accustomed to poor eyesight and found difficulty in doing tasks like driving or even reading or watching television. After surgery, you will be amazed at what you can now see and do all the things you couldn't.

It is important to visit your eye doctor to learn how to keep your eyes healthy. For more information on cataracts you can visit our website at www.trinidadseyehospital.org.

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