



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 040 | Vision conditions

Congenital cataracts

What it means

Congenital cataracts are cloudy areas in a lens present at birth or identified in early infancy. They may affect one or both eyes. A cataract that blocks useful visual input can disrupt visual development, so assessment and treatment timing matter. Not every small cataract needs immediate surgery. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Possible causes include genetic conditions, some metabolic disorders, infections before birth, and other eye differences. Sometimes a cause is not found. The child's overall health and whether one or both eyes are affected guide investigation and genetic counseling where appropriate. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

An unusual white or gray pupil, poor visual response, a drifting eye, or unusual eye movements may be noticed. Some cataracts are found during newborn eye examination. A white pupil can have several important causes and should not be diagnosed from a photograph alone. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

A pediatric eye specialist examines the lens, retina, eye structures, vision, and whether the opacity blocks the visual pathway. Assessment may include investigation for associated medical or genetic conditions. The team explains whether monitoring or time-sensitive treatment is required. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Visually significant cataracts may need surgery to remove the cloudy lens. Optical correction with contact lenses, glasses, or an implanted lens in selected circumstances, plus amblyopia treatment, can be essential afterward. Long-term follow-up monitors visual development and complications such as glaucoma. Removing the cataract alone does not complete care. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Follow the prescribed drops, optical correction, and follow-up plan. Ask for practical teaching on lens or glasses use and how to manage difficulties. Support accessible interaction and play while vision develops. Do not delay appointments because a child seems comfortable using the other eye.

When to seek help

A white pupil, suspected cataract in an infant, sudden loss of visual response, or painful red eye requires prompt specialist assessment. Follow postoperative emergency instructions.

Questions for your care team

- Does the cataract block useful visual input?
- How urgent is treatment and what optical correction follows?
- What long-term complications will be monitored?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss congenital cataracts. Congenital cataracts are cloudy areas in a lens present at birth or identified in early infancy. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Cataract surgery is one part of a longer visual development and follow-up plan.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Lens: the eye structure that helps focus light.
- Opacity: an area that is not clear.
- Optical correction: glasses or lenses that focus an image.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Childhood Cataracts - NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/childhood-cataracts/>

[2] Amblyopia (Lazy Eye)

<https://www.nei.nih.gov/eye-health-information/eye-conditions-and-diseases/amblyopia-lazy-eye>

[3] Vision Rehabilitation

<https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/vision-rehabilitation>