

# Having a Yag laser capsulotomy following cataract surgery

The aim of this information sheet is to answer some of the questions you may have about having a Yag laser capsulotomy. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you do have any questions and concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## What is a Yag laser capsulotomy?

A Yag capsulotomy is a special laser treatment used to improve your vision after cataract surgery. It is a simple, commonly performed procedure which is very safe.

During your cataract operation, the natural lens inside your eye that had become cloudy was removed. A new plastic lens was put inside the lens membrane (called the bag or capsule) in your eye. In a small number of patients, the capsule thickens after surgery and becomes cloudy. This interferes with the light reaching the back of the eye. When this happens, your sight becomes misty, and you may get glare in bright light or from lights at night-time.

Capsule thickening can happen in the months after your cataract operation, but more commonly occurs about two years after surgery. Yag laser capsulotomy is the only way to treat this. Apart from affecting your vision, the thickening does not damage the eye in any way.

In a Yag laser capsulotomy the doctor uses a special lens to apply a laser beam to the capsule. This creates a small hole in the centre of the capsule, which lets light through.

## What happens during a Yag laser capsulotomy?

You will need to visit the outpatient department for about half a day. The treatment will be performed in one of our laser treatment rooms as a 'walk in – walk out' procedure. Special preparations such as fasting or changing into operating theatre clothes are not necessary.

You will have some drops put into your eye to make the pupil big, and an anaesthetic eye drop to numb the surface of the eye.

You will then sit at a machine – similar to the one used to examine your eyes when you routinely visit the eye clinic – which has a special laser attached.

The doctor will put a special mirrored lens on your eye before applying the laser beam. This lens allows the doctor to view the membrane clearly so he or she can apply the laser and make a small hole in it to clear the vision.

The treatment is painless due to the anaesthetic drops used to numb your eye before the laser and takes approximately 20 minutes.

After the procedure, you will return to the waiting area. Your doctor or nurse may check the eye pressure about one hour later. He or she will then examine the eye to check the hole in the capsule.

## **What are the benefits of having a Yag laser capsulotomy?**

The laser treatment is to remove the cloudy capsule thickening in your eye, which aims to restore your vision to how it was after your cataract operation.

## **Are there any risks associated with a Yag laser capsulotomy?**

Complications after this treatment are very uncommon. Occasionally the pressure inside the eye rises immediately after the laser treatment. If this occurs, you may need extra treatment before you can go home.

This treatment usually comes in the form of eye drops, but may come in the form of tablets. Your doctor will let you know which treatment you need and advise you of how long you need to take the treatment for.

If we do treat you with eye drops, a doctor or nurse will put them in your eye before you leave hospital. You will be asked to remain in the department until your eye pressure has lowered to a satisfactory level. This should take a few hours at most.

Occasionally the opening made by the laser beam is incomplete, or not big enough. This will be discovered either after your treatment, or on your follow-up visit. If this is the case, it will be necessary to repeat the treatment at a later date.

Extremely rarely, some patients can get a build up of fluid in the macula, the part of the eye responsible for detailed central vision. This build up of fluid is called macular oedema (swelling), which causes blurring or distortion of vision. Another extremely rare complication is retinal detachment, when the fine light sensitive membrane at the back of the eye can come away from the wall of the eye.

The following symptoms mean that you need urgent treatment:

- excessive pain
- sudden onset of floaters (caused by small pieces of debris that float in the vitreous humour of the eye)
- loss of vision
- flashing lights
- increasing redness of the eye.

**If you experience any of these symptoms, telephone the Ridley Clinic for advice immediately (contact details are on page 4), or visit your nearest accident and emergency department.**

## Are there any alternatives?

An alternative to a Yag laser capsulotomy is to do nothing. The capsule may or may not continue to thicken. If it does, you may wish to consider a Yag laser capsulotomy at a later date.

## What do I need to do to prepare for the laser treatment?

Since this is an outpatient treatment, you can eat and drink as normal. You must continue to take any eye medication as normal on the day of the laser treatment (unless instructed otherwise).

## Asking for your consent

We want to involve you in all the decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This confirms that you agree to have the procedure and understand what it involves. You should receive the leaflet, **Helping you decide: our consent policy**, which gives you more information. If you do not, please ask us for one.

## What happens after the procedure?

After the treatment, most patients find that their vision is usually blurry for four hours from the drops. Bright lights can also be bothersome. Because of this, it can be helpful to have someone to go home with you, but this is not essential. You should not drive or ride a motorbike or bicycle for the rest of the day.

Following the procedure, no special treatment is required, and you can go back to your normal daily activities straight away. If you have discomfort once you have returned home, we suggest that you take your usual pain reliever following the instructions on the pack. It is normal to have itchy, gritty or sticky eyes and mild discomfort for the remainder of the day after the treatment.

You will be asked to come to the outpatient department a few weeks after the laser treatment to make sure your eye has settled down properly. This appointment will be given to you before you leave the hospital.

## What do I need to do after I go home?

Anti-inflammatory drops may be prescribed after the laser treatment. These help to minimise inflammation (not infection) within the eye. People normally have to take these only for a few days or a week at most – your doctor will tell you how long you need to use them for. You do not need antibiotics, as there is no open wound on your eye.

## Contact us

If you develop any of the symptoms featured in this leaflet, or need urgent advice about your eye(s), please telephone the Ridley Clinic:

**t:** 020 7188 4304 – Monday to Friday, 9 to 5pm, or

**t:** 020 7188 7188 – Monday to Friday, 9 to 4pm and ask for eye casualty

If you call outside of clinic hours then call 020 7188 7188 and ask to be put through to accident and emergency.

## Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'    **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's    **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

## Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

**t:** 020 7188 3416

## Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815    **fax:** 020 7188 5953

## NHS Direct

Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 0845 4647    **w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

## NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** www.nhs.uk

## Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years. To join:

**t:** 0848 143 4017

**e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk

**w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk

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