

Cataracts Toolkit

Helping you access
cataract surgery

RNIB

Supporting people
with sight loss

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Introduction

Are you currently finding it difficult to get cataract surgery in England? Or have you had problems in the past? This toolkit is for you! It provides practical steps to help you access first or second eye cataract surgery. There's a range of advice about getting the most out of your appointments and steps to take if your surgery is significantly delayed.

We want to make sure that anyone who would benefit from cataract surgery doesn't have to face long waiting times or restrictions.

You shouldn't have to wait for your sight to get so bad that you struggle with everyday tasks before you get surgery. We want you to stay independent and to avoid having sight problems for longer than you have to.

Sometimes your ophthalmologist (hospital eye doctor) may want to delay surgery for clinical reasons, for example if you have another eye or medical condition.

If you have any questions about your eye health, please contact our Eye Health Information Service: call **0303 123 9999** or email eyehealth@rnib.org.uk



Don't forget to share this toolkit with your family and friends who have cataracts, or get in touch about your experience. Call our Campaigns Hotline on **020 7391 2123 or email campaigns@rnib.org.uk**

What's happening now?

Across England, wide variations exist in cataract commissioning policies, which are the guidelines used to decide who gets cataract surgery. This is resulting in surgery being unfairly restricted in some areas of the country, creating a “postcode lottery”.

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are local organisations responsible for making decisions about the health services provided in your area.

They commission services – which means deciding what health services should be provided, who will provide them, and how much should be spent on them.

CCGs are under pressure to cut their spending and worryingly, one way they're doing this is by providing fewer cataract surgeries. Some CCGs are saying that people's visual acuity (how well they can see detail) needs to be at a certain level before they can have surgery. However, measuring someone's visual acuity doesn't take into account the day-to-day problems a cataract can cause, for example problems with glare and bright lights or judging depths.

Current waiting times for cataract operations vary across the country.

If you feel you are waiting for a very long time for your operation and your cataract is affecting your everyday life get in touch with the RNIB campaigns team or follow the steps below.



What should be happening?

Cataract surgery is proven to be a safe and cost-effective treatment for both eyes.

The operation to remove your cataracts can be performed at any stage of their development. However, because any surgery involves some risk, it's usually worth waiting until there is some change in your vision before removing the cataract.

The latest guidance from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists (<http://bit.ly/2af7Jls>) says that visual acuity shouldn't be the only measurement in deciding whether cataract surgery is needed. Other symptoms like glare, difficulty

judging depths of kerbs or stairs, and trouble recognising faces must be taken into account.

So if you're having problems in bright light, recognising faces, or finding reading, getting out and about, and cooking increasingly difficult, then it may be time to consider having your cataract removed.

Decisions about when you can get cataract surgery should be made between you and your ophthalmologist (hospital eye doctor). Surgery is not without risk, so it's important to discuss the merits and risks of surgery with your doctor.



Getting the most from your appointment

You may be referred to the hospital for cataract surgery by the optometrist, also called an optician (person who examines eyes to detect problems in vision) or your GP. Or you may be at the stage where you're already meeting with your ophthalmologist (hospital eye doctor) to discuss your surgery.

Whichever stage you're at, you need to make clear to the optometrist, GP or ophthalmologist any visual symptoms you may be having and how your cataracts are affecting your day-to-day life.

Don't forget to outline all the symptoms you're experiencing and the impact the cataract is having on your everyday life!

Common experiences are:

- your vision has become cloudy or more washed out.
- you've noticed a change in your colour vision: things appear more yellow than before.
- edges of stairs or kerbs have become more difficult to see.
- you may feel you need a lot more light to read smaller print.
- lights may seem to glare.
- you don't feel safe to drive.
- headlights of cars dazzle you more than they used to.
- you have difficulty recognising peoples' faces.
- you're finding it difficult to work or can no longer carry out tasks that you were able to do before.

Take action

If you're still having problems getting cataract surgery when you need it, here are some tips on what action you can take.

Write to your CCG

Your local CCG may have a policy on who should receive cataract surgery. This will explain whether you qualify for cataract surgery based on a few things.

If the policy has a strict rule on visual acuity as its only way to decide whether you need surgery then their policy goes against recommended commissioning guidelines.

Writing to your CCG is a simple but important thing you can do to advocate for yourself and others in your community going through the same experience.

To find out how to contact your local CCG, visit this website, and enter your postcode:

<http://bit.ly/29qwiAr>

Contact your MP

Although your MP isn't the person making the decision about when people can access cataract surgery in your local area, they can help make your case.

Why not write a letter to your MP or request a meeting with them? Let your MP know about your experience and what assistance you need.

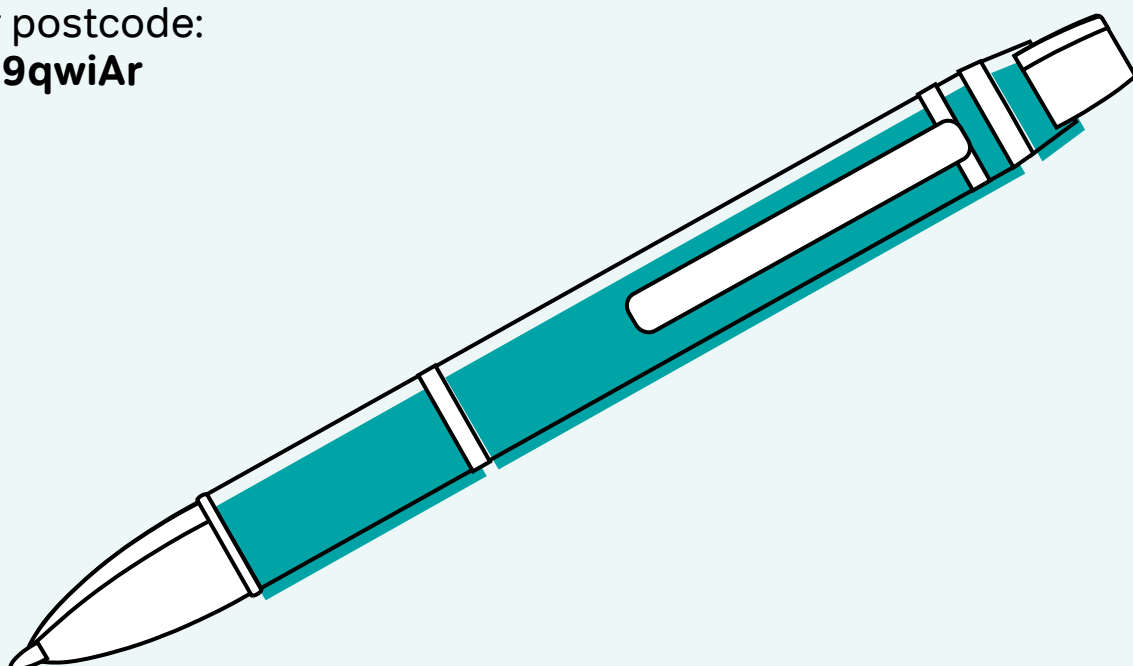
You can find out who your local MP is by visiting the following website and entering your postcode:

<http://www.parliament.uk/>

You can also check in your local public library, or at your local town hall.

Follow this link:

<http://bit.ly/2b23gGc> to use RNIB's simple online form to write your letter. It will automatically find your MP's contact details and send your letter.



Contact your Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you are still having difficulty getting cataract surgery despite your visual symptoms, PALS will provide confidential advice, support and information, or can help you to make a complaint.

You can find your PALS in your local hospital. Visit this website to find out the contact details:

<http://bit.ly/29kxann>

You can also ask your GP surgery or hospital for details of your nearest PALS.

Contact your local Healthwatch

Healthwatch listens to the views of local people and makes recommendations and reports on health services to drive improvements locally. Help get cataracts on the agenda!

Contact your local Healthwatch today and share your story about accessing cataract surgery in your community. You can find your local Healthwatch by visiting their website and entering your postcode: **<http://bit.ly/29mXWhj>**



Write to your local newspaper

Your local paper is there to report on the issues that matter to local residents like you.

One easy way of raising awareness about your restrictive cataract policy is writing a letter to the editor of your local paper. Local papers have a 'letters to editors' section where letters from readers are published. You can choose whether you want them published with your name or anonymously.

Follow this link:

<http://bit.ly/2au4XjW> to use RNIB's simple online form to write your letter. It will find your local newspaper's contact details and send your letter.

Contact us – share your story

If you're still having problems getting surgery, we can help! Get in touch if your local area is restricting cataract surgery or if you need any advice on what to say when writing or talking to decision-makers about your cataract surgery.

We'd also love to hear your experience of using this toolkit. Your feedback helps inform our campaigning work to ensure people can get cataract surgery when they need it.

If you'd like to receive this toolkit in an alternative format, please get in touch with us.



Call us on our Campaigns Hotline on **020 7391 2123** or email **campaigns@rnib.org.uk**



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