

CATARACTS AND INTRAOCULAR LENSES (IOL) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

(Updated 08/27/2025)

1. What is a cataract?

A cataract is a condition where the lens can become progressively opaque, interfering with vision. It often presents as blurry vision, like viewing things through a cloudy piece of glass. It may also be noted at night and with reading fine print. Most cases occur in people over 60 but can occur at younger ages in patients with diabetes mellitus, chronic use of steroids, or with a history of eye trauma. It is the most common cause of blindness.

In some cases, visual acuity may be 20/20 or better, but the individual still has poor quality of vision that could affect the ability to fly or control traffic.

2. What do I need to consider when choosing an implanted (intraocular) lens if I am a pilot or ATCS?

The type of lens implanted may result in adverse effects such glare, halos, loss of contrast sensitivity, or poor quality of vision, especially at night. These adverse effects can be disqualifying.

The individual should discuss with the eye doctor that as a pilot or ATCS, night vision and the absence of halos or glare is very important.

Simple lenses or monofocal lenses which correct distance vision are less likely to result in adverse visual effects. However, the individual may still require reading glasses.

Multifocal and extended depth of focus (EDOF) lenses reduce the need for reading or intermediate (computer length) glasses but are more likely to have visual side effects.

3. What type of lenses are currently available?

Monofocal lens: Correct an individual's vision at only one distance (either near, intermediate, or distant). They tend to be less expensive and less likely to cause halos or night vision abnormalities. However, the individual may continue to need glasses to read or see instrument panels.

Multifocal lens: Are designed to correct vision at multiple distances—such as near, intermediate, and distant—similar to bifocal or trifocal contact lenses. There are multiple brand names available. Multifocal lenses are typically more expensive. They may not provide vision as sharp as monofocal lenses, and can sometimes worsen night vision, especially when driving. Some people may also notice glare or halos around lights, and may still need reading glasses.

Light Adjustable Lens (LAL): LAL is not multifocal. It requires additional time after implant before returning to flight or safety-related duties as the lens must be locked in. Eyes must be protected from UV light until locked in.

Presbyopia* correcting lenses: This includes both multifocal and EDOF lenses.

*Presbyopia is a condition in which the individual loses the ability to see things up close as a normal part of aging.

4. How do I tell which lens type I have?

Check with the eye doctor.

5. How long do I have to wait after lens replacement surgery or cataract surgery?

It depends on the type of lens implanted. Before return to flight or safety-related duties, the individual must meet all criteria outlined in the [FAA Lens Implant Status Summary sheet](#) AND meet the vision standards for the class of medical certificate held.

6. Is there a specific wait time between surgery on each eye?

The treating eye professional will make that determination. There is no FAA required wait time between left and right eye procedures. (Many institutions correct one eye first and then 2 weeks later, correct the other eye, while some use 1 week, and others do surgery on both eyes the same day.)

7. What if I have lens replacement and can no longer meet the FAA vision standards?

If no longer correctable to standards, the AME will need to defer. A medical flight test may be authorized for a possible SODA or Special Issuance.

8. My eye doctor has released me, what do I need to check before I fly or control traffic?

The individual should ask themselves the following questions and discuss any concerns with the eye doctor or AME:

- “Has my night vision returned? “
- “Can I drive at night without glare?”
- “Does light bother my eyes less than before my surgery?”