

## CATARACT SURGERY PREPARATION GUIDE: GET THE BEST OUTCOME

*Patients have powerful choices at their disposal throughout the cataract surgery process. Here are the decisions you can make to get the best possible result*

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**I need  
cataract surgery.**

**How do I ensure a great result?**

# Introduction

Hello and welcome to this short guide to making the best choices surrounding your upcoming cataract surgery!

In this guide I'll share what you need to know to get the best cataract outcome if you have decided to get treatment. I'll explain how to choose the right provider for your treatment and discuss some frequently asked questions about cataract surgery. You will also get some tips for a speedy recovery and learn what to keep in mind in the first month after your treatment. Lastly I will share with you several reasons why you may want to consider deciding on private care for your cataract, and why I believe you will want to consider me as your chosen expert.

If you have cataract, my aim is for you to learn what you need to know to take the next step in properly addressing this condition. If I can answer any questions please don't hesitate to contact me on 02031264439.

Best wishes,



**Laura Crawley**

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## How do I assess my surgeon?

### 5 essential qualities of a top cataract surgeon

When you are ready to make the first step and book your cataract consultation, it is not always easy to find the right provider. When choosing a surgeon for your treatment, there are some aspects for you to look at before making your decision.

## 1. Does the cataract surgeon have an NHS contract?

The UK and NHS have one of the most rigorous training programmes for ophthalmic surgeons in the world. To obtain a consultant ophthalmic surgeon post in an NHS hospital takes years of subspecialty training, studying and multiple exams, so you can be reassured that the surgeon has received highly sought after Royal College approved training.

Competition for places in ophthalmology training is highly competitive, and if your cataract surgeon has obtained a consultant post in an NHS hospital, they will have worked incredibly hard to get this challenging & privileged post. They are also subject to annual appraisal and revalidation by the General Medical Council meaning that their clinical and surgical practice is evaluated annually to ensure they are “up to date & fit to practice.” This appraisal process should give you reassurance that this consultant practices to the high standards the NHS and Royal College demand.

Most consultants who offer private cataract surgery will tell you where their NHS contract is on their website or in the information portfolio. They will also tell you what their sub-specialist skills are and this is incredibly important if you are a patient who has other eye problems and is seeking cataract surgery. For example, as I am a glaucoma specialist as well as a cataract specialist I can discuss how cataract surgery can help the pressure control in your eye meaning that we use the one operation to address both issues.



**“You can only make the right decision about your eye care if your cataract surgeon gives you correct and personalised information.**

**Your friends may have had cataract surgery and been very happy, but you can't be sure that their condition or situation is the same as yours.”**

## 2. Does the surgeon's website connect with you?

Most private cataract surgeons have a website that gives you information about them as a surgeon and information on the conditions they treat. This website is their 'shop-front', and they will have taken great care in preparing the information they put on their website. You can get an excellent feel for how the surgeon may be in person.

I wanted to make my website as patient-friendly as possible and give lots of information about the conditions I treat including cataracts. I passionately believe that patients should have access to high-quality information about their eye problems in a meaningful format that is easily accessible for them and their family and friends who will support them in the preoperative stage and aftercare following cataract surgery.

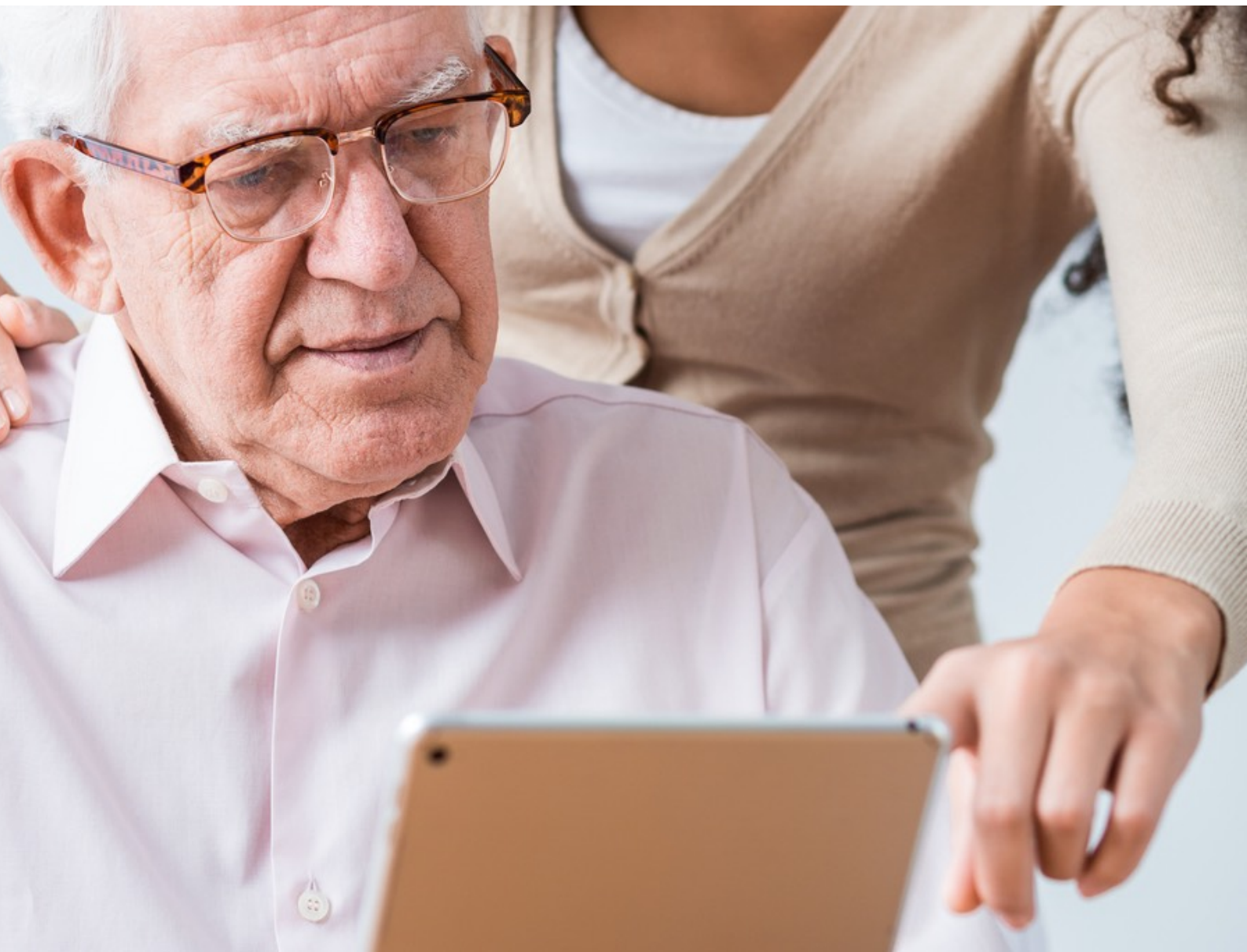
You can only make the right decision about your eye care if your cataract surgeon gives you correct and personalised information. Your friends may have had cataract surgery and been very happy, but you can't be sure that their condition or situation is the same as yours. Cataract surgery is not a one size fits all operation, and the cataract surgeon's website should reflect this.

On their website, you can also see the surgeon's affiliations, e.g. one would expect a top private cataract surgeon in London to be a member of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and other national & international societies of the subspecialties they treat. For example, I am a member of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, the UK and European Cataract & Glaucoma Societies amongst other prestigious highly regarded professional groups.



Affiliations will also give you some information about any teaching and training they do. Excellent cataract surgeons are often very keen to pass on their skills and experience to eye surgeons in training.

Training other cataract surgeons is a significant part of my NHS job and one I am very proud of. I am frequently asked to give lectures and talks on the conditions I treat, both at home and internationally. My podium experience shows the level of peer support I enjoy and connect with meaning I am aware of the latest treatments and surgical techniques (both those that work well and those that probably don't) giving you greater confidence that your treatment plan will reflect the proven research.



### 3. Where does the surgeon consult and operate?

Cataract surgery is the most common operation carried out in the UK and is highly successful in skilled hands.

As a patient, you will see your cataract surgeon at least once in the run-up to your operation and once or twice afterwards. You will also have a pre-operative assessment for the very detailed measurements required to choose your new lens implant. Most surgery is carried out under local anaesthesia. That means the patient can leave hospital 1-2 hours after the procedure has finished. Some patients prefer to have a general anaesthetic, and your surgeon should be operating in centres where you have both options.

In cases of general anaesthesia, your surgeon should have a good working relationship with the anaesthetist.

For example, I am very fortunate in working with several highly skilled anaesthetists who all have NHS contracts in London teaching hospitals and most of whom I work with in my NHS practice. The easy interaction between the surgical team and anaesthetist is critical to a successful outcome from surgery.

The logistics of attending and having relatives with you at each stage as required is something you should think about when booking your first appointment. I have operated on many patients who live locally in London but have also looked after lots who chose to travel from much further afield. These patients who travel further do so because they wish to have an excellent surgeon operate on their eyes in a centre of excellence such as Harley street or Imperial College Private Patients in my case.

An excellent cataract surgeon and their team will make the whole process as easy as possible from the initial appointment to discharge to ensure that they schedule all appointments at mutually convenient times. An excellent cataract surgeon will also see you in person in the initial consultation and at the follow up ensuring you have personalised care and continuity throughout. This continuity is incredibly important to me, and you can be reassured as a patient that if you have questions before or after surgery, you will be dealing with the same doctor – me.



## 4. Quantity and quality

Numbers and statistics matter. All consultant eye surgeons with an NHS contract have their practice evaluated and benchmarked on a rolling annual basis- both NHS & private operations. A good private cataract surgeon will share this information with you; the number of cases they operate on and the complexity of these cases as well as the success rates of their surgery.

Remember that surgeons who operate in hospitals with highly complex disease e.g. Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust face very challenging and difficult surgical cases and so are very experienced in dealing with more difficult cases but also in dealing with straightforward ones. If you are a patient who has more than one eye problem and need cataract surgery or you have only one good seeing eye that now needs surgery you should consider how experienced your surgeon is in dealing with more complex cases.

As a teaching hospital surgeon who has trained in Oxford, Moorfields and Imperial College my skills in dealing with complex cases are highly refined, continually evaluated and despite the complexity of my case mix I have higher than average success rates in cataract surgery. No operation is risk-free, and you should view any surgeon that promises you 100% success with scepticism.

Cataract surgery is highly successful, and any increased risk factors you may have that could potentially affect the success of your surgery should be openly discussed before you set a surgery date. An excellent private cataract surgeon will always do this.

A woman with curly hair is smiling and pouring wine from a bottle into a glass. A man wearing a cap is smiling and watching her. They are outdoors, with a tree trunk visible in the background. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

**“Mutual  
trust and  
respect  
must  
exist.”**

## 5. Face to face first impressions

Ultimately nothing will tell you that you have made the right choice of surgeon until you meet them face to face.

A good result from any operation including cataract surgery needs a good working partnership between the surgeon and the patient. Mutual trust & respect must exist. It's like viewing the house that you might buy or arriving at a hotel for your holiday, first impressions are critical.

All excellent cataract surgeons and their team will make you feel at ease. You should be encouraged to ask questions and should be directed to information to look at after the consultation just in case you forget some of the things discussed. You should never feel pressured into paying for surgery on the same day as a consultation, even if someone offers you a discount.

**"A good surgeon will want you to be delighted with your choice before booking the date."**

The decision to go ahead with surgery is an important one, and a good surgeon will want you to be delighted with your choice before booking the date. I do my utmost to make sure you have the right clinical information and support when scheduling your surgery. When you decide to go ahead, you should feel reassured that you have made the best decision for you and your loved ones as cataract surgery can transform your sight and quality of life!



## What should I expect from a good surgeon at my cataract consultation?

### What tests should I expect at the first consultation?

Once you've found the right surgeon you feel comfortable with and booked a consultation, there are some tests you have to have before your cataract surgery.

A thorough cataract assessment involves a detailed examination of your eyes front to back on the slit lamp microscope. You will also have a detailed OCT scan of the optic nerves and retinae, highly sophisticated technical measurements of the length & curvature of the eye, known as biometry and in some cases a test of your peripheral vision known as Humphrey Visual Field testing. The assessment and testing will take approximately one hour.

You will have dilating drops instilled in your eyes to open the pupil so that I can see the back of the eye and the cataracts in detail. until the effects of the dilating drops have worn off and this takes 2-4 hours. If it is a sunny day it is advisable to bring sunglasses to wear afterwards.

**"Once you've found the right surgeon you feel comfortable with and booked a consultation, there are some tests you have to have before your cataract surgery."**






## How do I choose the right lens - regular or premium?

You've made the decision to go ahead with cataract surgery, now you need to choose what type of lens to have.

### Distance lens

The commonest lens implanted is a high quality monofocal lens that corrects your distance vision very accurately. If you are used to reaching for your glasses or contact lenses first thing in the morning, then you will be pleasantly surprised that you no longer need to do that after cataract



**“Ask about multifocal  
or ‘premium’ lenses  
which can work to  
correct your distance  
and reading vision.”**

surgery. These distance lens implants are very accurate and hugely successful by sharpening the clarity and colour of your vision. You will still need glasses for reading the small print at near afterwards though.

## Monovision lens

Some people use contact lenses to correct one of their eyes for distance and one for near. We can replicate this with cataract surgery, and this is called monovision.

## Multifocal lens

Another option is to think about a multifocal lens. These implants try to correct your distance and reading vision in an attempt to make you less reliant on glasses for near tasks. They are also known as premium lenses, not because they are better than the high quality monodical distance lens implants but because you have to pay extra, an additional premium, for these lenses whether you are self funding your treatment or insured. These are not available on the NHS at present outside of clinical trials. They are not suitable for all patients though (e.g. pilots are not allowed to have them as they can induce glare and halo effects in some cases), and we can discuss this in detail in your consultation.

## Astigmatism

If you have significant astigmatism, we may be able to correct that with a toric lens. These are hugely successful in correcting non-complex astigmatism, and I use them a lot. Modern lens implant technology is highly sophisticated, and the lens choice is as individual as you.



## Is there a difference when treating both eyes vs one eye?

Cataract surgery is carried out on one eye at a time. To have both eyes operated on at the same time is unusual and is usually associated with issues around their general health or co-operation with surgery e.g. patients with dementia or difficulties in tolerating an operation. For routine cataract surgery it is usual to operate on each eye individually and I advise a minimum of 2 weeks between first & second eye surgery.



## How will you know your cataract surgery is successful?

You've made all important decisions about your surgery and will now profit from the results.

Having clear vision and seeing beautiful colours once more after cataract surgery is a truly wonderful phenomenon.

It is normal for the eye to look red and feel a little gritty after surgery and this can last for several weeks as the eye and wounds heal. The vision will

clear progressively over the first week post-operatively. All surgery causes inflammation and to combat this you will have some anti-inflammatory drops combined with antibiotic drops to use for 4 weeks after surgery. We do not expect you to experience severe pain or lid swelling. This is rare after cataract surgery (less than 1%) and could be a sign of infection. Should you experience this you must contact your surgeon or eye emergency department urgently.

## What happens if you notice that your vision is not quite as clear as it was just after the operation and what you should do about it

The human lens/cataract is held in place inside the eye by a capsule. The capsule is like a 'shrink-wrap' suspended just behind the pupil by tiny springs called zonules. The skill in cataract surgery is removing the lens without damaging the capsule as this holds the new lens implant that allows you to see so clearly. The capsule is initially clear but after a cataract operation, it can become cloudy or frosty just like having a cataract again.

This is called 'posterior capsule opacification or PCO.' It's common and it's not a major problem. You may have heard people say 'my cataract came back.' Strictly speaking, this isn't true as the human lens when removed is gone forever. What they

**“The skill in cataract surgery is removing the lens without damaging the capsule as this holds the new lens implant that allows you to see so clearly.”**



“Get back  
to doing  
what you  
love.”

mean is that the capsule frosted over and their vision was like it was when they had the cataract.

PCO is easy to diagnose on the slit lamp microscope. It is simple to treat with a laser known as YAG laser capsulotomy. This laser treatment is painless and takes approximately 15 minutes to do. You have your eye dilated and put your chin onto a microscope very similar to the one you're used to when you are having a normal eye examination. A contact lens is used to focus the laser treatment precisely on the frosting and it clears it away, rather like cleaning your car windscreen of frost in the morning. You see a bright flashing light but it is painless. Recovery is quick with the vision improving over the next day or two. It doesn't involve going to theatre and you can go home straight away.

If you think you may have PCO then an eye examination is the best way to confirm this. With a simple treatment the clarity your vision can be restored and you can see in technicolour again.





## Top 5 tips for a speedy recovery from cataract surgery

Once you've had your successful cataract surgery, there are a couple of things you can do to experience a speedy recovery and get back to your normal life as swiftly as possible.

### 1. Don't panic!

Cataract surgery is almost always carried out on one eye at a time. People can still function relatively well with one eye, and you do not have to stay at

home for the whole four weeks after surgery when you need to be taking your drops. Day-by-day, your vision will recover, and you will start to notice new clarity in your vision and vividness of the colours around you. I often find that patients are much more relaxed when it comes to having the operation on their second eye. At this point they know what to expect and it's never as bad you imagine it to be.

## 2. Know what drops you have to take (and when) after cataract surgery

Don't be afraid to ask the surgical team at the hospital if you are still not sure what drops you have to take and how often. I operate on patients with routine cataracts who have no other eye problems and also on patients who have advanced glaucoma and other serious eye problems. The advice and instructions are different in each case so you will never be asking a "silly question" or be expected just to know what to do. It is good practice for the instructions to be written down and for them to be explained to you face to face before you leave the hospital. If you are confused or unsure please just ask. As a surgeon, I would rather you were absolutely clear about the drops rather than you becoming anxious at home because something was unclear or causing you worry.

## 3. Expect your eye to feel gritty after cataract surgery

Modern cataract surgery is highly technical and skilled but it is still an operation, and you will feel like you have had a procedure in your eye. It is completely normal for the eye to feel gritty like the feeling of sand in your eye for several days after surgery. Use the drops as instructed and take paracetamol or your normal painkillers to help you through the first few days if you need to. Try not to compare how your eyes feel after surgery with other

friends or family members who have had the same procedure. We all heal slightly differently after surgery. Even the experience of the first and second eye in the same patient can be different in the days after surgery. We do not expect you to have severe eye pain or swelling and this should always be reported to your specialist immediately.

## 4. Do enjoyable things in the weeks after cataract surgery

There are very few absolute no-nos after surgery. For example, most surgeons advise that you cannot swim for 3-4 weeks after surgery to reduce the risk of infection. We do not say that you must sit at home with only yourself for company. It is fine to do things that you enjoy in the weeks after



surgery. As long as these activities do not stop you from putting in your drops, they are perfectly safe. I often get asked “when can I drive” and the official answer is as soon as you can read a number plate at the required distance and are sure that the operated eye is not interfering with the other eye. The DVLA do not specify a time and rely on people to be sensible and obey the normal vision requirements for driving a car.

## 5. Book your follow-up visits at the same time as you book your cataract surgery

Everyone is different when it comes to follow-up appointments. Routine cases are often seen once only at 3-4 weeks after surgery. Cataract surgery in patients who have glaucoma and have micro stents, laser treatments or functioning trabeculectomies need more frequent follow-ups. It is advisable to know this before your operation so that you can plan accordingly. Proper follow-up consultations are critical to the success of any cataract operation so make sure you discuss your requirements with your specialists so that you know what to expect.

In summary, cataract surgery will probably not be as bad as you might imagine it to be. As long as you know what drops you need to take and when, manage your expectations around how your eyes will feel, and remember to resume your normal life after cataract surgery, you should recover swiftly.

One excellent way to prepare is to book all of your follow-up visits at the same time as you book your cataract surgery. After that, all you’ll have to do is focus on enjoying your improved vision and all of the freedom and joy it can bring.

“Follow my tips and you’ll maximise your chances of a speedy recovery after cataract surgery!”



## The first month after cataract surgery - what to keep in mind

In addition to the tips above you can support your recovery by coming in for follow-up appointments and being especially careful with aftercare.

### **The first month after cataract surgery:**

- You will have antibiotic and anti-inflammatory drops for four weeks. It is important that you use them as directed throughout that time.

- You cannot swim or use a steam room for one month after the operation.
- You can return to driving as soon as you can read the number plate at the required distance. There is no prescribed time to refrain from driving. You must ensure you meet the normal DVLA standard.
- Routine bathing and hair washing is fine. But try not to allow soaps to enter the eye for 1-2 weeks after the operation. They can irritate the eye and rubbing it may disturb the wounds.

**“Support your recovery by coming in for follow-up appointments and being especially careful with aftercare.”**

- You will wear a clear shield at night for two weeks to stop inadvertent rubbing of the eye when asleep

# About the author



My name is Laura Crawley, I'm a Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon with a specialist interest in cataract surgery, glaucoma and common red eye conditions such as blepharitis and conjunctivitis.

I work at Central London seeing private patients and we have fantastic instruments and technology that really does provide high-quality assessment for cataract patients. I'm also very lucky that my NHS practice is at Imperial College in London which is a very well respected unit and we see patients from all over the country, providing me with a very strong experience in cataract care.

I offer very flexible appointments and we make sure that you get all your investigations and tests in a timely fashion. Our technicians and nurses are excellent.

As we've talked about in this guide, not everyone who has cataracts, requires treatment. You need a highly experienced surgeon to say "you don't need treatment and I'm not worried about you at the moment." I really like to involve patients in this decision-making process. The first step is the initial consultation. At this appointment, it's critical that your surgeon will spend as long as you need so that you feel comfortable in choosing the best option for your cataract treatment.

# Final words

I'm very lucky to have lots of testimonials from patients and colleagues. They like coming to see me and I feel very reassured that patients keep coming back - this means you must be doing something right! Good care is not only about clinical excellence, but also about spending time, discussing the options, making sure that patients really understand what's wrong with their eyes - because if it was me, I would want to know.

*"I had the best experience working with Dr Crawley. I felt looked after and she took the time to get to know me. I would highly recommend her."*

*- Sven K.*

That's why I try to give patients as much information as possible, so that they understand why we are giving them the treatment that we give to make it easy for people. My cataract surgery complication rates are very low, lower than an average cataract surgeon. I also train junior surgeons, so

I have plenty of experience with plenty of surgeries. The aftercare is really important, so I believe very much that we support our patients all the way through.

If you would like to discuss your particular eye concerns please call us on 020 3582 7642 to make an appointment. We'll explore the best treatment options for your eyes so you can get back to doing what you love.

*"I was treated with great courtesy and kindness, and everything was explained to me in layman's terms so I could fully understand my condition. I was immensely impressed."*

*- Paul*