

# The Eyes Have It

## *Half of All Seniors Over 65 Develop Cataracts, But Laser Surgery Is Successful in 95% of Cases*

By CASEY FISCHER

**A**s an artist, Rita Gould considers her eyesight exceedingly important. Which is why, when she was diagnosed with cataracts, she was devastated.

She needn't have been. Rita, a 72-year-old portrait and landscape artist from St. Petersburg, recently had cataract surgery performed on both eyes – one of the safest and most effective medical procedures you can get – and was more than pleased with the results.

"I had one eye done and was amazed at how bright and clear the colors appeared to me," she said. "I immediately scheduled surgery for the second eye two weeks later. It was painless and the actual surgery only lasted about 10 minutes."

Modern cataract surgery – which involves removal of the tainted, or cloudy, lens, and implantation of an artificial lens – has been around since the 1940s, and new techniques are making the surgery more and more successful.

Cataract surgery has a success rate of over 95 percent in patients with otherwise healthy eyes – a good omen for America's aging population. More than half of Americans 65 years of age or older have cataracts (the average age of those who have cataract surgery is 74), and

the Mayo Clinic estimates that more than 30 million Americans will suffer from the affliction by 2020. In fact, due to the United States' rise in life expectancy, a person is more likely to undergo cataract surgery than nearly any other procedure.

"In five to 10 years, there won't be enough surgeons [to do the procedure], due to the baby boomers," Dr. Steve Updegraff of Updegraff Vision in St. Petersburg told *OceanFront Magazine* during an exclusive interview. "But not only are the boomers in need of the surgery, it's also becoming a younger problem, as well."

When Updegraff entered into private practice in 1995, most cataract patients were in their 60s and 70s. Now many are in their 40s and 50s.

Active lifestyles and increased exposure to ultra-violet rays can be contributing causes of cataracts, explained Updegraff, which might explain why people are getting them younger.

"I have had patients in their 40s surprised they have them," said Updegraff. "These are often active people involved in sports, and they are more aware of changes in their vision."

Still, most people who get cataracts are older – although smoking, diabetes, and eye trauma can be contributory factors in younger patients

– since, in the majority of cases, cataracts are caused by the natural aging process, and cannot be prevented.

Cataracts affect a person's vision by clouding the lens of the eye. In order to produce a sharp image, the lens must be clear to let light focus on the retina. If the retina gets a bad image, then a bad image is sent to the brain and you are left squinting in an attempt to make out what is in front of you.

If any of these problems begin to interfere with daily living, then it's time to see an ophthalmologist. Also, if you're 60 or over, a yearly eye exam is recommended.

The good news is, cataract surgery technology is always improving, making the procedure not only faster but more precise.

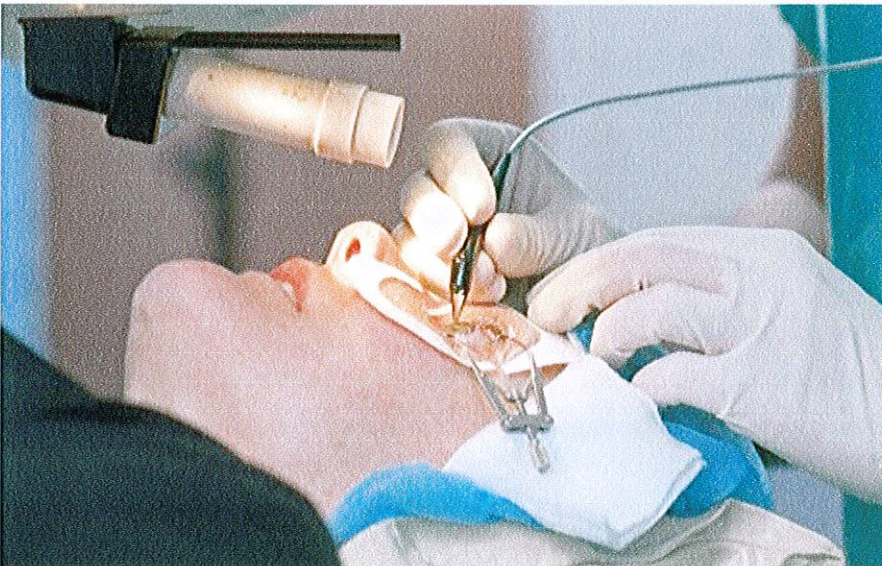
"Today, we physically make an incision with a diamond blade and then blast the cloudy lens with sound waves," explained Updegraff. "We replace the old lens with an intraocular lens, and the small incision requires no stitches."

The intraocular lens becomes a permanent part of your eye and, unlike your natural lens, it won't wear out.

Much like with eye surgery for poor vision, surgeons are opting for laser surgery for cataracts. "We're moving more and more to laser surgery," said Updegraff. "With a laser, we can simplify the procedure by making an even smaller incision and then break up the old lens at the same time."

This technology is not just on the way, it's here. The most anticipated, cutting-edge cataract procedure is the soon-to-be-available femtosecond laser-assisted cataract surgery, which will offer surgeons the ability to make even more precise cuts in the eye without damaging surrounding tissue. After multiple clinical trials, the femtosecond lasers exceeded manual incision techniques in every measurable category, including precision, control, and efficacy.

Cataract surgery can not only correct cataracts but end the need for bifocals, according to Dr. David E. Hall of the Pasadena Eye Center in St. Petersburg. In a clinical study, 78 percent of patients who had the AcrySof IQ ReSTOR multifocal lens implanted during cataract surgery reported no longer needing glasses.



*The latest in cataract surgeries can not only correct cataracts but end the patient's need for bifocals.*