

Clearly better

New lenses allow cataract patients to toss their glasses

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Eye specialists admit cataract surgery has not changed much in the 20 years they've been clearing the fog of old age by implanting new, clearer lenses.

But a surge in lens implants means today's baby boomers now can be glasses-free after cataract surgery, providing an edge their grandparents never had.

"No longer is the objective simply to remove the cataract and improve vision with glasses," said Dr. Gary Keoleian, an ophthalmologist at Michigan Eye Institute and on staff at Genesys Regional Medical Center. "Now our goal is to enhance vision and minimize dependence on reading glasses and bifocals."

A new lens, called AcrySof ReSTOR, was approved for the market earlier this year to correct cataract and vision. It gives patients a chance to ditch glasses while addressing the cloudiness that comes with cataracts.

Chances are even that by age 65 you'll have some degree of fogging of the lens. After age 75, as many as 70 percent of Americans have cataracts significant enough to impair driving or reading.

As we age, the human lens can become clouded and the best way to treat it is to remove the old, clouded lens and provide a replacement.

Gil Glassmeyer, 76, scheduled cataract surgery in August after years of monitoring his vision. But if the snowbird who spends winters in Florida was going under the knife he wanted to get the best advantage possible, he said.

"I asked him "If I do this, will I still have to wear glasses?", said Glassmeyer of Columbiaville, one of Keoleian's patients. "He said I might not have to."

Glassmeyer had the ReSTOR implant, and the results took some getting used to.

"In the mornings I still reach for my glasses or when I'm taking off a shirt," he said. "It's just old habit. I wore glasses for 40 years."

Most any cataract patient could opt for the ReSTOR lens except for those with macular degeneration or diabetic retinopathy in which years of diabetes has damaged fragile eye vessels.

"Other procedures previously allowed patients to see distance but still need reading glasses," said Dr. Edward J. Stack, an ophthalmologist at the new Michigan Vision Institute in Flint Township. "It's made an incredible difference for seniors who are still quite active into their 60s and 70s."

Medicare covers part of the cost of the new lens, developed by Alcon. The company released a new lens implant last year that protectively filters blue light in the same way a natural lens can.

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