



your HEALTH your HEALTH

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Cataract surgery was a revelation for Mary, 60

The world has never looked better than through the eyes of retired software engineer Mary Sutherland. She has ditched the glasses she wore for more than 50 years, thanks to two 10-to-15-minute operations.

The 60-year-old has had a cataract removed from each eye and can hardly believe the huge difference it has made to her life.

Mary said: "I began to notice at work that if there was a presentation in a room which was dark or if there wasn't a strong contrast such as black on white or white on black I just couldn't read it - especially if there was low light."

"I have always been very shortsighted and started wearing glasses when I was about seven or eight."

"When I began finding it difficult to read things, I think it was eight years ago, I put it down to getting older."

"I was going to the optician on a regular basis because there was also an issue of the pressure in my eye and I was on the borderline of having glaucoma."

"I remember doing one eye test at the optician and it just seemed my eyes were full of tears."

"The optician thought that he could see the beginnings of cataracts and I was referred to the ophthalmic consultants at Loughborough Hospital."

That proved the start of something of a long and winding journey. In 2008, Mary saw a number of different consultants.

She said: "It would depend on the consultant I saw as their opinions varied - each seemed to have a different view."

"Some thought I had cataracts, others didn't but that was partly because the focus was on the possibility of developing glaucoma."

Mary, from Loughborough, then saw consultant Amar Alwity.

She said: "My eyesight was getting worse. I was able to carry on driving but it was more difficult because the road markings were not as clear as they used to be."

"As a result I didn't drive at night if I could avoid it." In October last year her doctor said that he thought the cataracts should be removed.

Two 10-to-15-minute operations have brought the world into sharper focus for retired software engineer Mary Sutherland - she doesn't even need to wear glasses any more. **CATHY BUSS** reports

Mary said: "I was a bit apprehensive."

"On the day of surgery everyone arrives at the same time and you have to have three sets of eye drops and then the oldest person goes first."

"It only took between 10 and 15 minutes and all you can see is bright lights and water, but there is a cage over your eye to hold it open."

She was given two sets of eye drops - one of antibiotic drops and one of steroid drops - and there was a patch over her left eye.

The next morning proved a revelation.

Mary said: "Because I had always been shortsighted, everything was blurry unless I had glasses or my contact lenses in."

"But the morning after the first cataract operation I took the patch off and I could see the bedroom clearly without any glasses or contact lenses. It was fantastic."

Mary had the second cataract removed - the one on her right eye - in January this year.

She has now been able to ditch her distance glasses - although she does need glasses to read.

Mary said: "The artificial lens which is put in to replace the one which has the cataract corrected my distance vision so my sight has improved. "It is fantastic and I feel great. Removing the cataracts has also lowered the pressure in my eyes, so I am no longer at risk of glaucoma."

"If anyone is going to have a cataract removed they shouldn't be concerned - it is one of the best things you can do."



PICTURES: WILL JOHNSON
I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW: Mary Sutherland, from Loughborough

ASK THE EXPERT

About half of UK's over-65s affected to some degree

AMAR Alwity is a consultant ophthalmologist at Loughborough Hospital.

He said: "As we get older, almost inevitably we develop cataracts."

"The lens is like a Smartie inside the eye."

"It should be clear like a magnifying glass lens but instead it becomes cloudy, resulting in blurred vision."

"The lens lies behind the pupil and it is usually transparent to focus the light on to the retina."

"On reaching the retina the light energy is transformed into nerve signals, which are then sent to the brain."

As the cataract worsens the less light reaches the back of the eye and the vision blurs.

The condition gradually begins to worsen to the extent it affects a person's day-to-day life.

Mr Alwity said: "Currently, surgery to replace the affected lens is the only option."

"In the UK, cataracts are thought to affect about half of those aged over 65 years to some degree, with this figure rising to 70 per cent in those aged over 85."

"The fact people are living longer every decade means the prevalence of cataracts is on the rise and they are more common today than ever before."

"When we take the cataract out we replace it with a new lens."

"We have the opportunity to take away long or short sightedness by choosing the appropriate lens power to put into the eye."

"This can mean that people who have worn spectacles since they were a child will suddenly be able to walk around without glasses on."

"For those with glaucoma we can place a clever stent/tube into the drainage network of the eye at the time of cataract surgery to bring the pressure inside the eye down and potentially get people off some of their drops."

For more information, visit:
www.mids-eyecare.co.uk



CATARACTS happen when the lens of the eye loses its transparency and vision becomes cloudy or misty.

The lens is behind the pupil and when a cataract develops it stops the light from reaching the back of the eye.

As they can develop over many years problems may not be noticed at first.

They often develop in both eyes although each eye may be affected differently.



People affected may also find it more difficult to see in either a dim or very bright light. The glare from

bright lights may also be dazzling or uncomfortable to look at.

Cataracts are not painful and they do not irritate the eye.

They are very common and although they tend to affect older people, babies and young children can be affected.

It is not clear what causes a cataract to form but risk factors which may be linked to the condition are a family history, having

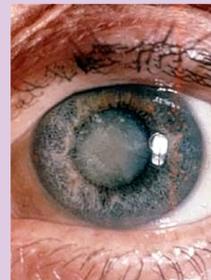
diabetes, smoking, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol and lifelong exposure to sunlight.

There is no known way to prevent cataracts.

Surgery is the only treatment which has proved effective.

It involves removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with a clear plastic one.

Surgery is usually carried out under local anaesthetic and recovery is about two weeks.



VISTA, the Leicestershire sight loss charity has information on cataracts and can offer help to people affected by the condition.

The charity also runs advice and information services in the ophthalmology outpatient clinics and hospitals at Leicester Royal Infirmary, Coalville, Hinckley, Loughborough, Market

Harborough, Melton Mowbray and Rutland Memorial Hospital, in Oakham.



In addition, a phone helpline is open Monday to Thursday, from 9am-5pm and on Friday, from 9am-

4.30pm, on 0116 249 8839. For more information visit:
www.vistablind.org.uk

THE RNIB - Royal National Institute of Blind People - has information on cataracts. The charity runs a phone helpline which is open Monday to Friday, from 8.45am-5.30pm on 0303 123 9999.

People can also e-mail: helpline@rnib.org.uk
For more information visit:
www.rnib.org.uk