

# EYE DISORDERS AND TREATMENTS

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In the last 20 years as many as 1.5 million patients have undergone cataract surgery with intraocular lens implantation each year, with an overall success rate of almost 98%. This has provided new vision to people who otherwise would have become blind or dependent upon the old thick cataract glasses or contact lenses. This procedure has resulted in the continuation of active lives – driving, playing golf, tennis, reading and remaining independent until late in life when some other disorder impairs them.

This has come at no small price to our health care system, and despite numerous cost containment measures by Medicare and Managed care, the cost remains significant. An exciting new development is a Russian physician who has developed a substance which he claims to be over 80% effective in arresting and reversing the aging process and cataract in patients. This product will be undergoing clinical trials in the United States in the next five years and, if proven to be successful, will revolutionize the treatment of cataracts.

In the area of retinal surgery, progress continues to determine the causes of age related macular degeneration, and some progress has been made with medications that offer some protection to patients in early stage disease. Invasive surgical procedures do not seem to offer much in wet forms of macular degeneration, but some new studies of blood vessels in tumor growth may hold promise for better understanding of the disease. Currently, The National Eye Institute is sponsoring the study of several substances that inhibit new blood vessel growth in the macula.

Medicare now reimburses for “glaucoma screening” and detection has become much more sensitive and precise with the introduction of a device called the ocular coherence tomographer, which can actually measure the thickness of the nerve fiber layer (optic). New and quicker visual field tests detect visual field loss much earlier. These tests coupled with newer pharmacologic agents, such as prostaglandin agonists, and selective laser surgery, offer treatments with very few, if any, side effects for most patients.

Recognizing that many glaucoma patients *do not have elevated eye pressures* has led to the new concept of neuroprotection and new medical and perhaps nutritional treatment may prevent glaucoma in the future. High risk patients include those with a family history of glaucoma, diabetes mellitus, hypertension African-Americans, and Hispanic ethnic groups. Medicare will now pay for routine glaucoma evaluation and screening tests.

Older citizens in their fifties often consider refractive laser surgery for nearsightedness. A number of procedures have been attempted for farsightedness with limited success for those who want to reduce their dependence on eyeglasses



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for reading. The insertion of a contact lens in the eye, in place of laser refractive surgery, has been approved in Europe and is nearing FDA approval in the U.S.

One of the most common and annoying eye symptoms for older adults is itching and burning eyes, a condition made worse by the semi-arid climate of Southern California. As we age the quantity and quality of the lubricating tear film in some patients deteriorates. This condition is easily treated with an assortment of over the counter tear film supplements. Numerous supplements taken orally, which contain essential fatty acids, are marketed and are undergoing careful evaluation by ophthalmologists as to their worthiness.

Those with Internet access may want to read more about ongoing developments in the understanding and treatment of eye diseases in the Health and Medical section of Vital Connections [www.Vitalco.net](http://www.Vitalco.net).

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