

# Young eyes for old

By MARTYN HALLE

## Hinged implant gives cataract patients eyesight of a twentysomething

**S**CIENTISTS have developed an eye implant for cataract surgery which can restore a patient's sight to that of a twentysomething - and avoid the need for reading glasses.

Cataracts are caused by a clouding over of the eye's lens. The condition can occur at any time but is most common with old age, and leads to blurring, double images and eventual loss of sight.

In normal cataract surgery, the lens is replaced with an artificial one, which is fixed for distance vision. This means that glasses are still needed for reading and close work.

But the revolutionary new implant is set on a hinge which allows the eye muscles to move it backwards and forwards - as they would do in the natural lens - so that the eye can focus both close up and in the distance.

It should give many middle-aged and elderly people the vision they had 25 years previously, according to eye surgeon, Sheraz Daya, who is one of only a handful of specialists using the lens.

"The majority of cataract patients would have been using reading glasses anyway because of the changes in the eye that begin to happen after 40, where the eye loses its ability to focus close up in short and long-sighted people. What the new lens does is to restore what they once had," he says.

"I have carried out the operation on about 200 patient and the results have been good in over 75 per cent of them."

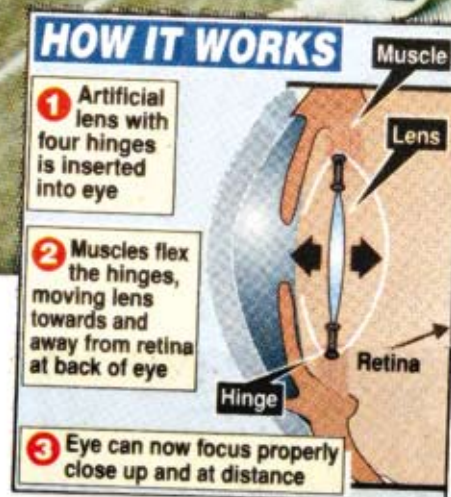
In trials of the implant, called CrystaLens, carried out by the American Food and Drugs Administration (AFDA), the results were even better, at just over 80 per cent.

Mr Daya, who runs the Centre for Sight at the Queen



Picture: TERRY BRADFORD

Seeing life through young eyes: David Sibthorpe



Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, West Sussex, believes that focussing implants are the way forward for cataract patients, but it could be years before such treatment becomes available to patients on the NHS because of the cost.

Hundreds of thousands of cataract operations are carried out each year on the NHS, costing around £800 per eye treated. When carried out privately, the surgery costs £1,800 er eye. But the new lens, which is currently available only privately, will cost £2,500 for each eye.

Putting in the hinged lens is similar to inserting a standard

replacement lens after cataract removal. The painless procedure lasts around 20 minutes per eye under local anaesthetic.

First the surgeon makes a tiny hole in the front of the eye and an instrument that emits soundwaves dissolves the cataract affected lens.

The new lens - which goes in folded up - is then put in place. Once inserted, it automatically unfolds and the hinges, which are made of the same high-tec plastic as the rest of the implant, are embedded in the iris.

The patient is given drops to use for several weeks and has a patch over the eye for a day.

A day after surgery the patient has a check up to make sure all is well. If so, patients normally have their other eye operated on around two weeks later.

**T**HE AFDA trials on the CrystaLens - carried out on 497 eyes showed no major complications from the operation. A slight drawback experienced by some patients is some glare at night while driving, but this tends to settle down.

We recommend patients use focusing exercises to get the eye muscle used to the lens ability to move, but even if you don't do this, eventually it will happen naturally." says **Mr Daya.**

David Sibthorpe, 61, is one of many patients who are extremely happy with their focusing replacement lenses.

The retired City investment manager from Forest Row, East Sussex, used to find life frustrating, having to fiddle with two pairs of glasses: one for distance and one for close up.

"I was constantly needing to change between the two pairs," says the keen golfer, who also owns a sea-going motor cruiser."

"On the boat is was particularly irritating because the change between cold weather outside and the warm cabin where I steered the vessel would make the glasses mist up. That was apart from having to swop the pairs over between looking out to sea and reading maps."

"Now life is so simple and my vision is perfect. I occasionally have to put on a pair of glasses at night to read if the light isn't too good, but otherwise it's fine."

"My eyes were focusing near perfectly within a few weeks of the operations on my eyes. I just carried out the exercises that were prescribed. I can now see as well as my son and daughter, who are 30 years younger than me. I'm the envy of a lot of friends who have fixed cataract replacement lenses and are still fiddling with glasses."

■ *CENTRE for Sight, Queen Victoria Hospital, 0800 011 2887 or 01342 321201*

