



In the blink of an eye

THE last 20 years has seen cataract surgery has change out of all recognition.

In the past surgery almost always needed a general anaesthetic and patients were kept in hospital for a week. But modern surgery is now performed with a local 'eye-drops' anaesthetic and the stay in hospital is very rarely more than a couple of hours.

Cataract surgery is one of the most commonly performed surgical procedures in the UK and has a very high success rate with a minimal risk of complications, says Mr Anthony J Vivian FRCS FRCOphth, a Consultant Ophthalmologist at BMI St Edmunds Hospital.

Here he looks at the problem and at the ever-improving treatments.

"A cataract is a change in the lens of the eye usually caused by ageing, not, as often supposed, a membrane growing over the eye," says Mr Vivian.

"It is the whole lens (centre of the eye) going cloudy. Some go yellow, some develop white areas while in some only the back of the lens is affected, in most the whole lens is affected.



EYE SURGEON: Anthony Vivian

"Nowadays surgery is performed with a keyhole technique The damaged lens or cataract is removed through a very small incision and then the new lens (made of acrylic) is rolled up and posted through the same incision. It is then allowed to unroll within the eye, taking the place of the old lens."

Quite often an improvement will be noticed on the first day after surgery with vision getting gradually clearer over the next few days. Healing should be completed by the end of four to five weeks when new glasses can be ordered.

In many cases distance vision after surgery is good even without glasses although most people will find they do need reading glasses.

"There is however, a lot of research going on to try to find a way to restore distance and reading vision without glasses and there are some lenses which can definitely reduce the need for glasses," said Mr Vivian.

"These lenses are called multifocal lenses and some patients find that they can get away without wearing glasses in most conditions. However, the ultimate lens that allows us to focus perfectly for both distance and near – as we did when we were teenagers - remains elusive at present.

"But, with the rapid changes in technology constantly going on all around us, I expect it won't be too long before someone finds a way of achieving a glasses free solution!"



CONSULTANT: Michael Gaunt

There's more to veins than vanity

Varicose veins can effect up to 20% of the UK's adult population. They are unsightly and painful but, worse still, can also lead to serious health problems.

Mr Michael Gaunt a Consultant Vascular Surgeon at BMI St Edmunds Hospital, who specialises in the minimally invasive treatment of varicose veins and threadveins, looks the options available to sufferers

"Varicose veins occur when small valves inside the veins stop working properly so that rather than blood flowing smoothly back towards the heart, the blood stagnates within the veins causing aching, tiredness and discomfort," explains Mr Gaunt.

"The veins are usually blue or dark purple and may also be lumpy or twisted in appearance and while any vein in the body can be affected, they most commonly develop in the legs and feet. This is because standing and walking puts extra pressure on the veins in the lower body.

"Initially, problem veins may not be visible but the symptoms still occur. Patches of blue threadveins may sometimes be the first signs of an underlying problem and eventually, the abnormal veins become swollen, enlarged and varicose.

"In the early stages varicose veins and threadveins may be mainly a cosmetic problem, however, if ignored, the condition can deteriorate and various complications can occur such as leg swelling, pigmentation of the skin around the ankles and ulcers.

"Sometimes veins can burst causing bleeding, or the blood

within the veins can clot leading to the painful condition of phlebitis or even deep vein thrombosis. People who use air travel for work or holidays may be at increased risk particular if those flights are long haul.

"Fortunately, modern minimally-invasive treatments can now often be performed under local anaesthetic as a walk-in walk-out procedure, with minimal post-operative pain and almost immediate return to normal activity.

"I have treated over 4,000 patients with the Endovenous laser and Clarivein techniques – both are associated with considerably less pain, bruising and scarring than traditional stripping techniques and both offer very good long-term results."

For more information or to make a booking, contact his private secretary on 01223 305858 or visit www.michaelgaunt.com.



St Edmunds Hospital

THE CONSULTANTS' CHOICE

BMI St Edmunds - your local private hospital

For more information on these or any other procedures please call 01284 701371 or visit www.bmihealthcare.co.uk/stedmunds

