

Thousands of Australians in the dark over cataracts

New report finds cataracts is taking a severe toll on mental health of Australians, but many are unaware about how to spot the symptoms

- *One in five Australians who have lived with cataracts became depressed¹*
- *Three in five Australians would fear loss of independence if vision impairment became an issue¹*
- *Over 700,000 Australians are now affected by cataracts², which if left untreated can lead to blindness; however, 65 per cent don't know how to spot the symptoms¹*
- *Cataract removal is one of the most commonly performed surgeries in Australia³ with options that can also treat other eye conditions, such as presbyopia (age-related far-sightedness)*

OCTOBER 11, 2018, SYDNEY – Older Australians are living in fear of losing independence, mobility and doing the things they love due to sight loss from cataracts, with one in five becoming depressed after diagnosis.¹

This is according to new, hard-hitting research, commissioned by Johnson and Johnson, set for release today on World Sight Day, which is focused on raising awareness about blindness and vision impairment.

According to former cataract sufferer, Geraldine Douglas, 63, a botanical artist from Melbourne, before surgery, cataracts caused her eyesight to slowly deteriorate, leaving her frustrated and apathetic.

"You take for granted the layers of enjoyment you feel from seeing the sparkle on leaves, ripples on water and glistening reflections," said Mrs Douglas.

"Once you have cataracts, the definition slowly fades away. You don't realise what you're losing until it's gone."

A cataract is a clouding of the clear lens in the eye.⁴ It is one of the leading causes of vision impairment in Australia.² Cataracts also have a significant impact on quality of life for individuals and communities. It is estimated that more than 700,000 Australians are living with cataracts today.²

The research, titled the Australian Cataracts Report, found that while four in five Australians have heard of cataracts, only one in three know how to spot the symptoms.¹

According to Dr Con Moshegov, Sydney-based ophthalmologist, Australians need to be more aware of how to spot cataracts and when to speak to an eye doctor.

"Our eyesight is one of the most important senses throughout our lives, but almost a million Australians continue to be affected by cataracts," Dr Moshegov said.

"Despite the large impact on Australians, awareness and understanding of cataracts is low with significant gaps in knowledge that are impacting the quality of life of many Aussies.

"By recognising symptoms and diagnosing cataracts, Australians can be more informed around how to manage the condition and improve their quality of life."

The report found that when vision was restored, Australians who had cataract surgery most commonly reported feeling much happier (54 per cent), regaining their confidence / self-esteem (40 per cent) and feeling useful again (30 per cent).¹

Mrs Douglas' work as a botanical artist requires great attention to detail. Eventually her cataracts meant she could no longer pursue her art. Fortunately, she recognised the symptoms and sought a consultation with an ophthalmologist who confirmed the diagnosis as cataracts in both eyes. They

then began the process of removing them through surgery. The focus on detail that she regained allowed her to renew her passion in her work.

"When I had cataracts, I had great difficulty differentiating hues, which massively affected my paintings. Looking back, I'm going to have to work on them!"

"The day after my surgery I got up and I just couldn't believe it. It was just fabulous. I couldn't wait to have the second one done," said Mrs Douglas.

Out of the Australians interviewed who have been diagnosed with cataracts, more than 70 per cent of those who intend to have surgery for cataracts are looking to have it within the next three years,¹ but according to Dr Moshegov, many are putting it off for too long and the best solution is to treat it early, as treatment can help with multiple eye conditions, such as presbyopia (age-related far-sightedness).

"Vision is what allows Australians to truly capture life's most precious moments. My patients report feeling more confident and are generally much happier after they have had the procedure.

"If left untreated for too long, cataracts can lead to blindness. Surgery is the only way to remove cataracts" said Dr Moshegov.

"Many Australians would be more likely to have surgery for cataracts if they knew the surgery could treat other eye conditions that meant they wouldn't need to wear glasses, for example, presbyopia, short-sightedness, and astigmatism," Dr Moshegov said.

Mrs Douglas said, "The benefits clearly outweighed any nerves."

"I was very surprised that people were hesitant about eye surgery. I would encourage them to find out as much as they can about cataract surgery, engage with a surgeon they're comfortable with and then go ahead," Mrs Douglas said.

"My ophthalmologist talked me through all the different lens options, including those that would help me avoid needing glasses. She was very helpful and supportive throughout the whole procedure."

For more information, Australians should speak with an ophthalmologist or healthcare professional.

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About cataracts and presbyopia

A cataract is a clouding of the clear lens in the eye and is one of the leading causes of vision impairment in Australia.^{2,4} While cataracts most commonly occur in those who are older, they can develop in younger people as well.⁴ In Australia, more than 700,000 people are affected by cataracts.²

Presbyopia is a gradual reduction of the eye's capability to change focus, particularly objects that are at a normal reading distance.⁵ In 2015, the National Health Survey (NHS) reported that 849,000 Australians were impacted by presbyopia.⁶

About the Australian Cataracts Report¹

To uncover and better understand the unmet needs in managing cataracts and presbyopia in Australia, Johnson and Johnson commissioned 'The Australian Cataracts Report'. The Australian Cataracts Report interviewed 1,226 adult Australians, including a nationally-representative sample of 1,016 Australians aged 18-65 and an additional 210 Australians over 60 who are living / have lived with cataracts. Participants were asked their perceptions on vision, cataracts and presbyopia. The research was commissioned by Johnson and Johnson and conducted by independent research firm, Edelman Intelligence.

As a leader in eye health, Johnson & Johnson Vision endeavours to raise awareness of cataracts and other eye conditions, including refractive errors.

The Australian Cataracts Report is the first survey of its kind in Australia to investigate barriers and perceptions around managing cataracts. Johnson and Johnson has a long-held commitment to research and support programs to support people living with eye health conditions. The report is an extension of research conducted in the Asia Pacific region. Previous studies have explored barriers and unmet needs in managing cataracts in Singapore and Hong Kong.

About Johnson & Johnson Vision

At Johnson & Johnson Vision, we have a bold ambition: to change the trajectory of eye health around the world. Through our operating companies, we deliver innovation that enables eye care professionals to create better outcomes for consumers and patients throughout their lives, with products and technologies that address unmet needs including refractive error, cataracts and dry eye. In communities with greatest need, we work in collaboration to expand access to quality eye care, and we are committed to helping people see better, connect better and live better. Visit us at www.jjvision.com. Follow @JNJVision on Twitter and Johnson & Johnson Vision on LinkedIn.

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⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Health Survey 2014-15.

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