

Cataract Surgery May Cut Risk of Hip Fractures

July 31, 2012 - A new study suggests cataract surgery may help some senior citizens reduce their risk of fall-related hip fractures.

A cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens; symptoms can include blurry vision, glare and poor night vision. As a result, people with cataracts may be more prone to falls.

In the new study, individuals aged 65 or older who had cataract surgery were less likely to sustain a hip fracture within a year of the procedure when compared with their peers who did not have the surgery. Researchers analyzed Medicare claims data, but they did not have access to information on falls.

Their findings appear in the Aug. 1 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

During cataract surgery, the lens of the eye is removed and replaced with an artificial one.

The study included a 5 percent random sample of Medicare beneficiaries from 2002 to 2009 who had cataracts. Of the more than 1.1 million patients with cataracts, 36.9 percent had surgery during the study period.

Overall, 1.3 percent of this population sustained a hip fracture. Those who had cataract surgery were 16 percent less likely to sustain a hip fracture in the year after the surgery. This association was even more pronounced among people with severe cataracts, the study showed.

"Some people wait much too long for cataract surgery, and this puts the elderly at risk for a hip fracture or falling," said Dr. Mark Fromer, an ophthalmologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. "The better you see, the better you ambulate."

The time for surgery is when the cataract starts limiting what you can do.

"Elderly people are more fragile, so if they don't see a step or an elevation and trip, that could be a death sentence," Dr. Fromer said. "Cataract surgery takes less than 10 minutes and can dramatically alter a person's lifestyle."

The study only showed an association -- not a cause-and-effect relationship -- between cataract surgery and a reduced risk of fall-related hip fractures.