

Older Americans see better today, study finds

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Improved cataract surgery techniques, less smoking may be reasons why.

(HealthDay) -- Older Americans see better than their parents did in old age, according to a new study that finds visual impairment among the U.S. elderly has declined 58 percent since the 1980s.

Improved techniques in cataract surgery and lower rates of macular degeneration may be two of the main reasons for the trend, say researchers from Northwestern University.

"From 1984 until 2010, the decrease in [visual impairment](#) in those 65 and older was highly statistically significant," said the study's first author, Dr. Angelo Tanna, vice chairman of ophthalmology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and an attending physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

"The findings are exciting, because they suggest that currently used diagnostic and screening tools and therapeutic interventions for various ophthalmic diseases are helping to prolong the vision of elderly Americans," said Tanna in a university news release.

After analyzing national survey data collected from 1984 to 2010, the researchers found that in 1984, poor eyesight caused 23 percent of older adults to have trouble reading or seeing newspaper print. By 2010, however, only 9.7 percent of seniors reported the problem. The researchers also saw a significant drop in eyesight problems that limited the ability of older people to perform normal daily activities, such as dressing and bathing.

Little change in visual impairment was detected among adults younger than 65.

Although the study did not identify the cause of the lower rate of [vision problems](#) among older adults, the researchers suggested three likely reasons:

- Better techniques in [cataract surgery](#)
- A decline in smoking, which resulted in reduced rates of macular degeneration
- Improved treatments for diabetic eye diseases

The study authors said more research is needed to determine which treatment strategies help prevent [vision loss](#) in [older adults](#) so they can be made more accessible.

The study was recently published online in the journal *Ophthalmology*.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians

provides more information on common causes of [vision loss in older people](#).

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