

Cataract surgery tied to fewer car crashes for seniors

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(HealthDay)—Data on more than half a million Canadian seniors shows

that traffic accident rates fall after drivers undergo a needed cataract surgery.

The effect was relatively modest—about a 9 percent decline—but suggest that "improvements in visual function from [cataract surgery](#) are associated with decreased driving risks," according to a team led by Dr. Matthew Schlenker, of the Kensington Eye Institute in Toronto.

While the study couldn't prove cause and effect, the results do make sense, one eye specialist said.

"The most common symptoms of cataracts are blurry vision, sensitivity to light, glare, dimness of vision, and difficulty seeing at night," noted Dr. Matthew Gorski, an ophthalmologist at Northwell Health in Great Neck, N.Y.

All of those symptoms "can seriously impact a patient's safety while driving," said Gorski, who wasn't involved in the new study.

As the researchers explained, between 60 to 70 percent of Americans will develop a cataract—a clouding of the eye's lens—during their lifetime. Surgery remains the only viable treatment, and over 3 million cataract surgeries are conducted each year in the United States.

Do these procedures have any impact on [traffic](#) accident rates for senior drivers? To find out, the Canadian team looked at the medical and driving records of more than 559,000 Ontario residents aged 65 and older between 2006 and 2016.

The researchers found that traffic crash rates fell by an average of 9 percent in the year following a cataract surgery versus the 3.5 years before the procedure. This reduction was more pronounced—a 14 percent drop—among drivers over the age of 75.

Notably, cataract surgery had no effect on traffic accidents where the patient was a passenger or a pedestrian, only when he or she was the driver.

Overall, Schlenker's team calculated that one serious traffic accident would be prevented for every 5,000 cataract surgeries.

For his part, Gorski said the study should remind older Americans that "it is important for any patient who notices a change in vision to have an eye exam with an eye doctor. This study reiterates the importance for all patients over the age of 40 to have a yearly routine eye exam."

Dr. Mark Fromer is an ophthalmologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. He said the new study shows that "improved vision as a result of [cataract surgery](#) in the elderly population likely represents a significant reduction in economic societal costs, injuries and deaths related to traffic-related injuries."

The findings were published online June 28 in *JAMA Ophthalmology*.

More information: Matthew Gorski, M.D., ophthalmologist, Northwell Health, Great Neck, N.Y.; Mark Fromer, M.D., ophthalmologist, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; June 28, 2018, *JAMA Ophthalmology*, online

There's more on cataracts at the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#).

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