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The world's most common operation

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As many as 10 million people around the world suffer from cataracts. Thomas Kohnen of the Goethe University in Frankfurt and his coauthors discuss cataract surgery with the implantation of an artificial lens in the current issue of *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International* (*Dtsch Arztebl Int* 2009; 106[43]: 695).

Blindness is usually due to opacification of the lens. In Germany alone, more than 600,000 cataract operations are performed each year. Cataracts can be either congenital or acquired; age-related opacification of the lens is the most common type. The main symptom of cataract is slowly progressive worsening of vision, but glare disability and nearsightedness can also be signs of the disease.

Cataract operations are now usually performed on an outpatient basis. The eye is anesthetized, pretreated with antibiotics, and surgically opened. New approaches permit the operation to be performed through an incision smaller than 2 mm. In the phacoemulsification technique, the lens is emulsified and aspirated away through a vibrating hollow needle. The surgeon then implants an intraocular artificial lens. Patients without any other diseases of the eye can achieve a visual acuity of 1.0 or even better. Special optical designs for the artificial lens can further optimize the quality of vision and thereby improve patient satisfaction.

More information: www.aerzteblatt.de/v4/archiv/pdf.asp?id=66463

Source: Deutsches Aerzteblatt International

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