

Cataract Surgery Associated With Fewer Falls in Elderly

By KARA A. NYBERG
(Elsevier) 23. 01. 2006 14:27:00

Elders fall less and sustain fewer fractures following cataract surgery, according to a randomised controlled trial of 306 women aged over 70 years. Moreover, their general health status improves in terms of quality of life, activity, confidence, anxiety, and depression.

"Our study suggests that waiting for cataract surgery is detrimental to health, and that patients who fall while awaiting surgery should have their procedure expedited," said Dr. Rowan H. Harwood, of Nottingham (England) University Hospital, and his colleagues.

One-third of individuals older than 65 years fall each year, and these falls often lead to hospitalisation. Poor vision has been shown to increase the risk of falling twofold, but the effects on falling of interventions that improve vision have been little investigated.

The researchers randomised 154 participants to receive expedited cataract surgery, which occurred at a median of 27 days; the remaining 152 individuals were scheduled for routine surgery, which took place at a median of 337 days. Participants reported the incidence of falls every 3 months, and they completed several general health status questionnaires at baseline and at 6 months (Br. J. Ophthalmol. 2005;89:53-9).

During the 12 months of follow-up, the overall rate of falling for women who received immediate surgery was 34% less than it was for those who had to wait nearly a year. Although both the immediate- and routine-surgery groups experienced similar rates of first falls (49% vs. 45%), the risk of second falls fell by 40% for women who received expedited surgery (18% vs. 25%).

The risk of fractures was 66% less for the expedited group than for the group that had to wait for surgery (3% vs. 8%).

This study focused on first eye cataract surgery only, as standard practise in the United Kingdom requires that each eye be operated on separately.

The same research group, this time led by Dr. Alexander J. E. Foss, performed a second, identically designed study in which 239 elderly women were randomised to expedited or routine second eye surgery. "Binocular functions, such as stereopsis, should improve further with second eye surgery and might therefore lead to a further reduction in the rate of falling," the researchers noted.

Although gains in vision and general health status were again observed for the expedited-surgery group, the frequency of falling for the two groups was nearly identical (*Age Ageing* 2006;35:66-71).

The impact of second eye surgery on the overall rate of falling remains unclear. "The study had been conceived against a background of waiting times in excess of 1 year," the investigators noted. Because the waiting time for routine surgery was reduced from more than 1 year to less than 6 months during the trial, however, the study was not sufficiently statistically powered.

Copyright 2006 Elsevier Global Medical News.