



“The precision of the laser means many cataract patients are achieving 20/20 or close to 20/20 vision.”

Dr. Joe Parisi, chief ophthalmologist and medical director at Clemson Eye, performs laser eye surgery.

Cataracts and Astigmatism?

Greenville residents can have both corrected through a single 15-minute out-patient procedure

“In our Greenville clinic, we are definitely seeing an increase in the prevalence of cataracts in the local population,” says Dr. Joe Parisi, chief ophthalmologist and medical director at Clemson Eye. “But the increase in age-related eye diseases such as cataracts isn’t really a surprise given the aging population trend we’ve all heard so much about in recent years.”

The good news, says Dr. Parisi, is the options for treating cataracts have improved dramatically over these past few years, as well. Modern lens implants can provide clear vision at multiple distances and the recent introduction of the femtosecond laser to cataract surgery has added a much greater level of precision to the entire procedure. “I’d say these are game-changing improvements. They allow us to provide our patients with more predictably great visual outcomes,” says Dr. Parisi, adding, “Today, the use of advanced lens implants and the precision of the laser result in many cataract patients – regardless of their age – achieving 20/20 or close to 20/20 vision without glasses.”

Defining Cataracts

Cataracts are a clouding of your eye’s natural lens. They slowly develop over time, when proteins in the lens start to clump together, blocking light and causing blurry, dull vision. About 24 million Americans have them, and they typically start to develop by age 60. But they can start earlier, as one in six people over age 40 has a cataract.

Surgery is the only known treatment for cataracts, and two things happen during the surgery. Your clouded lens is removed and an intraocular lens is implanted. The lens requires no care and simply becomes a permanent part of your eye. You don’t see or feel the new lens.

Traditionally, cataract surgery was done manually using a blade, and there was only one “monofocal” lens implant option. The surgery can still be and often is performed this way, but some ophthalmology practices, like Clemson Eye, have invested in the very best technology and trained in the most advanced procedures so they can offer their patients the best possible visual results.

With traditional surgical methods, when a basic monofocal lens is implanted, it clears the vision at a single focal point, but it cannot correct astigmatism. This means corrective eye wear is still needed to reduce the blurring and distortion caused by an astigmatism.

Astigmatism Defined

Astigmatism is a defect in the surface of the cornea. The cornea is curved more like a football than a basketball, and this steeper curvature leads to blurry vision. Astigmatism is common and often present from birth. If a cataract patient wants to treat their astigmatism, too, their surgical options would include laser vision correction, astigmatic keratotomy or limbal relaxing incisions. But these would all be separate surgeries from their cataract surgery.

Now, however, if you require surgery to remove your cataract and you have astigmatism, you can have it corrected during your cataract surgery. Once they remove your clouded lens, your eye surgeon can also make limbal relaxing incisions with the laser and implant an advanced astigma-correcting Toric® lens. It is a 15-minute outpatient procedure, and most patients return to their normal activities shortly after surgery.

The Toric® lens corrects for both distance and astigmatism. There are other advanced lens options available to cataract patients today, as well, such as ReSTOR® and Chrysalens.

These types of lens implants allow you to see from close up to far away. They are revolutionary for patients who have worn glasses all their lives and, post-cataract surgery, no longer need them or are much less dependent on them.

The Toric lens implant, however, is the astigmatism correcting lens, which is pretty revolutionary in itself. With it, patients can see in the distance without relying on glasses. They can again drive at night and enjoy all the other activities they love without the hassle of or dependence on corrective eyewear.

“Our patient Dr. Herman Senter’s experience is indicative of the advantages of the advanced Toric lens implant,” says Dr. Parisi. “His cataracts and astigmatism were interfering with his lifestyle – he is a very serious outdoorsman. It is very gratifying to hear stories like his about what a substantial difference laser cataract surgery with an advanced lens implant have made for him.” See the sidebar.

Telltale Signs of Cataracts

Because cataracts generally do not cause pain, redness or tears, people often don’t even realize they are developing them. Here are the signs to be aware of:

- Blurred vision, double vision, ghost images, or you sense a “film” over your eyes.

- Lights seem too dim to see close-up, or night driving is difficult.
- New prescriptions for eyeglasses don’t improve your vision.

If you’re having difficulty going about daily activities, such as reading or driving your car, because of blurred vision then you may have a cataract. Left untreated, cataracts will lead to blindness. If you think you may have one, call Clemson Eye today to book your eye exam. The cost of basic cataract surgery is covered by the majority of insurance plans, Medicare and Medicaid. Laser cataract surgery and some of the modern lens implants can cost more.

Dr. Parisi and his medical partners at Clemson Eye have served patients in the Upstate for more than 40 years through their full-service clinics in Greenville, Anderson, Easley, Clemson, and a LASIK center, Spectrum Lasik, in Greenville. The eye doctors at Clemson Eye include Drs. Leroy Howard, Buddy Thompson, Brian Johnson, Donald Glaser, and Joseph Parisi. Together, they have more than 100 years of ophthalmic experience and have performed more than 50,000 cataract, microsurgical and LASIK procedures. They are a highly experienced team.

A Toric Adventure

By Dr. Herman Senter

The Grand Enchantment Trail (GET) is a 730-mile wilderness route between Phoenix and Albuquerque that passes through deserts, follows deep canyons and crosses Sky Island mountain ranges.



It is not a marked trail such as the Appalachian Trail. Rather the GET combines existing trails, primitive roads and cross-country travel.

Following the route requires navigational skills and a sharp eye for often obscure indicators of the way ahead. The rewards include spectacular scenery, abundant wildlife, pristine campsites, remoteness and solitude.

I hiked the GET almost a year after experiencing the miracle of restored and enhanced eyesight, thanks to my Toric lens implants and Dr. Parisi of Clemson Eye.

I doubt I would have finished the GET in the 50 days it took, or at all, otherwise. Spotting infrequent signs of the trail – a sawn log from confederate days, a cairn

in a canyon of rocks, a blazed tree in a forest – required keen eyesight, as did reading miles of vague foot tread through burned forests or seeing the subtle dip of a mountainside path buried in snow.

And I could see and observe the abundant wildlife, without stepping on it (had two close calls with rattlesnakes!). The dramatic scenery, from spectacular mountaintop vistas to the desert varnish of deep canyon walls, was appreciated in all its glory.

I am certain that my enjoyment of the GET would have been greatly diminished without the benefits of my cataract surgery and Toric lens implant. Just as I know that the fun of white water boating has increased with the Toric lens. For years I boated with 20/80 vision, peering through glasses that were at best water-spotted in the summer or totally fogged in the winter.

Thanks to my new, improved vision, I can now see rapids downriver (20/20) before I paddle into them, and I can read the micro-currents important to staying on line without the nuisance of glasses. Boating is even more fun and I’m paddling better because I can see where I am and where I need to go.

Hey, did I mention that I can again drive at night? And wow, are women ever pretty!

Dr. Senter is a retired Associate Professor of Mathematical Sciences at Clemson University.



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4200 E North St, 2 Centre East
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