



Picture: Mathew Lynn

Seeing clearly

Glaucoma surgery gave Irene Athanassiou the precious gift of keeping her sight, allowing her to continue doing all things she loves – like going out dancing with her husband, George.

For Irene Athanassiou, seeing clearly makes all the simple things in life shine brighter.

Whether she's cooking delicious foods from her Greek heritage, going out dancing with her husband and their friends, knitting a scarf for her daughter, or just reading a magazine, she thanks her glaucoma surgery for saving her vision and allowing her to experience the full richness of everyday life.

"My vision is now even better than it was before," she says.

A dressmaker by trade, with a wonderful skill for beading, Irene came to Australia

from Egypt in 1960. Here she married her husband, George, and had a daughter, Yvonne.

About five years ago, Irene was having her routine eye check when her optometrist found that something wasn't quite right.

Like many people over the age of 50, Irene had signs of glaucoma, a common ageing eye condition that affects the optic nerve, the connection between the eye and the brain. If left untreated, it can lead to vision loss and eventually blindness.

Catching glaucoma early gives you the best chance of saving your sight. Irene went to a specialist and started eye drop



Successful glaucoma surgery helped Irene Athanassiou, pictured with husband George, continue doing the things she loves.

medication, which aims to lower the fluid pressure in the eye. For many patients, this can be an effective way to slow or even stop vision loss.

Unfortunately, for Irene the eye drops weren't enough to slow the progression of her condition. The next recommended treatment option for her was surgery, which was performed by Dr Jennifer Fan Gaskin, a glaucoma specialist who leads CERA's ocular fibrosis research.

A challenging surgery with great results

Like the eye drop medication, glaucoma surgery aims to reduce fluid pressure in the eye to protect the optic nerve from further damage. To do this, surgeons create a new 'drain' in the eye that can help release the excess fluid.

This surgery is usually very effective, but like all surgeries, it comes with risks. For Irene, going ahead with the operation was a big decision.

"There was a risk that I would lose my sight, because one of my eyes did not have very good vision anyway. It was my good eye that they were trying to fix," Irene says. "It was stressful at the time, but Jennifer explained everything and made me feel calm and comfortable."

The operation was challenging, but Irene recovered fully and is thrilled with the results.

"I am very happy with my surgery and I am glad that I did it. For me, the benefits far outweighed the risks."

Her daughter, Yvonne, agrees. "She does a lot of activities like knitting, cooking and



reading, and it really shows how good her vision is now," she says. "We go out and she can read street signs clearly – it's amazing."

Research to improve glaucoma surgery

Seeing patients like Irene enjoy their vision is what drives Dr Fan Gaskin's passion for her work.

"I'm determined to do everything in my power to stop people with glaucoma from losing their sight," she says. "My research aims to find new treatments and discover new ways to improve glaucoma surgery by controlling scarring, which will give patients a better chance of a successful outcome."

Irene says she is extremely grateful for Dr Fan Gaskin's care, and for ongoing research that will help other people with glaucoma in the future.

Now she's spreading the word about the importance of glaucoma screening, to make sure others can catch it early and benefit from treatment like she did.

"I tell all my friends to make sure they have regular eye checks," Irene says. "Vision is so important and I am very happy that surgery could help me."

World Glaucoma Week Appeal

Help our research team develop life-changing therapies so more people with glaucoma like Irene can see clearly.

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