



American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
American Society of Ophthalmic Administrators
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Fact Sheet—Cataract Surgery & Prostate Drug Complications

The Situation

A retrospective and prospective study⁽¹⁾ has shown that the combination of one of the most common surgical procedures (cataract surgery) with tamsulosin (Flomax®), one of the most commonly prescribed prostate drugs for prostate enlargement, properly known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), could cause complications leading to serious eye problems. This complication is also seen with similar alpha-blocker drugs including terazosin (Hytrin®), doxazosin (Cardura®), and alfuzosin (Uroxatral®). These drugs caused a condition known as intraoperative floppy iris syndrome (IFIS). Taking Flomax or other alpha-blockers does not adversely affect eyesight.

The Good News

These complications can be avoided when ophthalmologists are aware prior to surgery that patients are taking Flomax or similar alpha-blocker drugs.

In a multi-center study surgeons have developed and refined three alternative approaches to overcome IFIS complications. When a surgeon is aware that the patient has taken alpha blockers, surgery can be performed with the same high success rate and low complication rate as conventional cataract surgery. As a result, patients should feel confident about cataract surgery and not delay or avoid it.

Cataract Facts

Cataract surgery is one of the most commonly performed procedures in the United States. The majority of cases are in adults older than 50.

- According to the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS), there were 2.79 million (2005) cataract surgeries in the United States.

IFIS

Intraoperative floppy iris syndrome occurs when the pupil constricts during surgery. The pupil must be widely dilated in order to perform the surgery. The syndrome is seen in patients who have or are taking alpha-blockers like Flomax. These drugs relax the iris muscle which opens and closes the pupil. If the iris problems are not anticipated or prevented, there is an increased risk of having surgical complications. IFIS was seen in patients who had not taken Flomax for two years.

- According to the study, about two percent of the surgeries will result in IFIS cases, or about 55,800 potential cases.

Complications Due to IFIS

While surgeons can alter their surgical techniques to accommodate IFIS, these rare complications can result:

- Retinal detachments, swelling of the retina, infections and other problems.
- An increased the risk of developing glaucoma. The higher pressure associated with glaucoma can push against the optic nerve and damage it. When this happens, vision can decrease or disappear altogether.

Who is at Risk

- The majority of these cases affect men (because Flomax and other alpha-blockers are mostly prescribed to them for prostate issues). According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), BPH affects more than 50 percent of men older than 60 and as many as 90 percent of men older than age of 70.
- Women will be increasingly at risk as the medication is prescribed for urinary retention. The FDA has approved Flomax for BPH only.

⁽¹⁾ [J Cataract Refract Surg](#). 2005 Apr;31(4):664-73.

The American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery is an international educational and scientific organization whose 9,100 member ophthalmologists specialize in cataract and refractive surgery. The American Society of Ophthalmic Administrators, with over 2,000 members, represents ophthalmic practice professionals who specialize in reimbursement, marketing, and business management. For more information, visit our website, www.ascrs.org.