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PATIENT: MUFFIN, A KOMODO DRAGON

You may know an older person who has trouble seeing. But lizards? You bet. After all, this 25-year-old resident of the National Zoo is no spring chicken. Muffin developed a *cataract*, or cloudy lens, in her right eye.

The lens lies behind the *pupil*, the dark circle in the center of the eye, and helps us focus on images. As people and animals age, their lenses become less flexible and less trans-

parent. Sometimes lenses turn milky, making it impossible to see.

Even with one good eye, Muffin was still able to find her food and patrol her zoo exhibit. But her vets were worried she would develop cataracts in both eyes. They decided to operate.

"First, I made a tiny cut in the *cornea*, the clear covering over the eyeball, and in the lens," says Seth Koch, the vet who operated on Muffin. Then he inserted a slender rod that bounced high-speed sound waves into the lens, breaking it into tiny pieces. Finally, he sucked up the lens pieces with a tiny vacuum in the rod. "It's like mashing a potato and sucking it up with a straw," says Koch.

Muffin's eye healed in two weeks. Her vision is back, though blurry. "She's much more active now," says Lucy Spelman, a vet at the National Zoo. "We thought she was quiet because of old age. Now we think it was because she couldn't see well!"



PATIENT: Muffin, a Komodo dragon
SYMPTOMS: Cloudy lens in her right eye
DIAGNOSIS: A cataract
TREATMENT: Surgery to remove the lens—the first time ever on a Komodo