

# IS LASIK SURGERY FOR YOU?

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The advertisements are on the radio, and they are all over television. In fact, everywhere you go it seems you hear about LASIK, the new laser vision-correction surgery that has freed so many people from their glasses and contacts.

Laser in Situ Keratomileusis (LASIK) is a surgical technique that uses an examiner laser to reshape the cornea. The outpatient procedure involves the creation of a flap in the cornea using a surgical device called a microkeratome. The corneal flap is then reflected over to expose the central portion of the cornea. The laser is used to remove microscopic amounts of the internal corneal tissue. The removal of the tissue changes the curvature of the cornea.

So is LASIK right for you? The opportunity to correct high degrees of nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism has never been more exciting. The technology that exist today and the understanding of the eyes healing process has made laser vision correction more accurate and safer than ever before. However, this surgery is not for everyone. It is important to discuss your situation with your doctor so that he/she might explain other available options. And while you may not be eligible for laser surgery, there are a number of different treatments that are highly successful. Intraocular lens implantation, for example, is a safe and reliable alternative for those patients that are too nearsighted or farsighted to undergo LASIK.

As with any surgery, there are also risks and side effects involved with the surgery that should be honestly and carefully discussed with each potential patient. While extremely rare (occurring in less than one percent of all cases), patients considering the surgery should be aware of these risks. The greatest risks include severe loss of vision due to infection, retinal detachment, or injury sustained by the optic nerve.

The side effects of the surgery are much more common, but most are minor and only temporary. All patients experience dry eyes following laser vision correction as a direct result of the temporary interruption of normal nerve fibers within the cornea. These fibers eventually reestablish themselves, but during the first several weeks, patients require the frequent use of drops to help control the symptoms.

Occasionally, it is necessary to temporarily place a small plug in the tear duct, which reduces tear drainage and allows the tear film to remain on the ocular surface for longer periods of time. The symptoms of dry eyes typically last between one and three months, but some patients experience symptoms for up to one year.

LASIK patients also often experience halos and glare around lights at night. Today, with certain lasers, this side effect, which usually disappears over time, may be reduced or eliminated entirely.

So how do you find the right doctor to perform LASIK surgery? With all the advertisements and competition, it is often hard to decide. Understand that all refractive surgeons, equipment, technology and surgical outcomes are not the same and that you definitely get what you pay for. Doctor experience is very critical, so do some investigating. Ask your potential surgeon for references so you can talk to other patients, and schedule a consultation to see if this surgeon is the right one for you. Laser vision correction is a big decision and a considerable financial undertaking. However, in the right hands, laser vision correction can be one of the most rewarding and freeing experiences of your life.