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Everything You Need to Know about LASIK Eye Surgery

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LASIK eye surgery is a type of vision correction many adults consider if they already use glasses and contact lenses for distance vision. But what is it, who is it for, how much does it cost, and how safe is it?

In a nutshell, what is everything you need to know about this surgery?

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What is LASIK eye surgery?

LASIK eye surgery is a third option, in addition to glasses and contact lenses, that's used to treat common vision problems (e.g., nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism). It's been approved since the mid-1990s. In 2001, it became the world's most common elective procedure.

The procedure relies on the expertise of a surgeon who's trained in the ophthalmic surgery. A LASIK surgeon uses what's called an "excimer" laser to reshape the cornea. Most people who get laser eye surgery therefore reduce their need for further vision correction, such as through glasses or contact lenses.

It's common for people to have LASIK eye surgery in both eyes on the same day and return to work one or two days later. Vision improves immediately, though it may continue improving for one year. Since 2003, customized technology, called "WaveFront" technology, has been available for laser vision correction. Developed by NASA, WaveFront customization yields safer, better results for many patients.

Who is LASIK eye surgery for?

About 80 percent of the adult population is a candidate for LASIK eye surgery. Many of them share key traits:

- Aged 18 or older (so that their prescriptions are more likely to have stabilized)
- Have a common vision problem (e.g., astigmatism, farsightedness, nearsightedness)
- Lead active lifestyles
- Cannot or prefer not to wear glasses and/or contact lenses
- Are in general good health

In addition, there are some medical requirements, such as strong tear production and thick corneas. You can find out fairly easily if you meet these criteria by having a professional consultation. These consultations take about an hour to an hour and a half, depending on your provider and your unique eyes. Many providers offer consultations for free, letting people learn if they're candidates. If it turns out you're not a candidate, most providers can offer an alternative surgery, such as [PRK](#), that offers similar results and uses similar technology.

How much does LASIK eye surgery cost?

The national average for Custom Bladeless LASIK—the most advanced, safest type of this surgery—is about \$2,000 per eye. Your price might vary based on geography, surgeon experience, package inclusions (such as enhancements for life versus enhancements for the first year after surgery), and other factors.

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Most insurance companies do not cover laser eye surgery, because it's considered an elective procedure for most people. (Firefighters, entertainers, military servicemen and servicewomen and others can sometimes make a case that they need this procedure.) However, many insurance companies negotiate discounted rates with some providers.

One common way for people to pay is through pre-tax dollars from an FSA, HRA or HSA. This can be a fast way to afford laser eye surgery today while saving hundreds in taxes.


How safe is LASIK eye surgery?


Over the years, technologic improvements—especially with Bladeless WaveFront technology—have increased safety. The overwhelming majority of people who opt for surgery experience no long-term complications. Much of the stigma regarding laser eye surgery complications date back to the earliest days of the surgery, when surgeons were less experienced, and laser technology was less advanced.


Immediately after surgery, it's common to use antibiotic drops and steroid drops to help your eyes heal. This lasts for about a week. The eyes can be sensitive to light in this time frame, and some people experience dry eyes and night haloes for up to several months after surgery (though sometimes longer). Despite this, one of the most common things people say afterwards is that they can't believe they waited so long to get laser eye surgery. It's not a bad idea to talk with people who have had LASIK eye surgery to learn first-hand what life during the healing process and life after the healing process are like.


What else should I know about LASIK eye surgery?

To determine if LASIK eye surgery is right for you, an article online can go only so far. The first step to learn more starts with getting a professional consultation. This lets an experienced ophthalmologist or optometrist examine your eyes, discover any eye conditions (i.e., dry eye, glaucoma and cataracts have all been discovered during LASIK consultations.) and see if you're a candidate for laser eye surgery. The consultation is your chance to learn about your unique eyes, your financing options and your journey toward a life less limited by glasses and contact lenses.


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