

# How to Decide If Lasik Surgery is Right for You

By Charles Hall

*“Lasik surgery can help significantly improve nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism, some of the most common vision problems, even in those who – if they qualify for surgery – have worn corrective lenses for years.”*

By now we've all at least heard about the “miracle” of Lasik and other forms of “laser” corrective eye surgery – surgery that will allow you to throw your glasses away once and for all. The good news is that a great deal of the hype is actually true – properly prescribed and implemented Lasik surgery can provide radical improvement for many basic sight problems. Without going into too much technical detail, Lasik surgery basically uses a laser to help reshape the cornea and thus improve the focus of light onto the retina and therefore, improve vision. Lasik surgery can help significantly improve nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism, some of the most common vision problems, even in those who – if they qualify for surgery – have worn corrective lenses for years.

Is Lasik surgery right for you? First, your eye doctor should make the initial determination. You may have retinal problems or irregularities, high “intraocular” (inside the eye) pressure which could be an early sign of glaucoma, or even a temporary problem like “dry eye disease” which needs to be addressed before Lasik surgery is performed. Once your eye doctor has resolved these issues to his satisfaction, he may recommend Lasik surgery.

You should exercise the same care in choosing a doctor to perform the Lasik surgical operation as you would for any other surgery – seek out recommendations, ask for references and compare prices – and check to see if your eye surgeon is accredited through the American College of Surgeons, and/or associated with a teaching hospital or university – places where he or she is likely to stay abreast of the latest information and technology in the field. Though Lasik surgery has become so popular that people tend to take it lightly, Lasik is a serious, delicate surgical procedure – it would be foolish to take risks or cut corners where your vision is involved. And there can be complications. Figures seem to indicate that a small percentage of people – about five percent overall – have complications from Lasik surgery, the risk does exist – vision distortion, infection, inflammation, double or ghost images and dry eye among others. Night vision problems and in extreme cases permanent corneal damage have also occurred. Fortunately, most vision errors can be corrected by a second Lasik procedure – in fact, since

Lasik is not necessarily a completely exact science, there is also some danger of under or overcorrection which might also require an additional procedure.

Other conditions such as diabetes, which effects healing, and diseases or medications which effect the immune system also may effect whether or not you should consider Lasik surgery – you should inform your doctor of all pre-existing conditions and any medications you may be taking well before scheduling a Lasik procedure so that the risk can be adequately assessed.

Remember, Lasik is for most of us a voluntary, cosmetic or lifestyle surgical choice designed to rid us of dependence on eyeglasses and contacts and to, at least in part, improve our appearance or youthfulness. You need to weigh these benefits against the potential risk for you.

How much should you pay for Lasik surgery? Costs vary widely and you shouldn't necessarily pick the cheapest. Costs have risen to almost double in the past few years, partly due to the popularity of the procedure, partly due to increasingly sophisticated procedures being used on more patients – called Custom Lasik, uses 3D imaging to more accurately guide the laser in altering the corneal surface, resulting in more individualized correction of vision problems like myopia, hyperopia and astigmatism. Average prices per eye (how the price for Lasik is always quoted) in 2004 ran close to \$2,000 per eye.

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