

What is LASIK Surgery and how should a patient prepare for it?



LASIK eye surgery is easily the most commonly performed laser refractive surgery to correct faulty vision.

LASIK is the short form for **Laser-Assisted In Situ Keratomileusis**. It is a procedure that permanently changes the shape of the cornea, the clear covering of the front of the eye, using an excimer laser. The surgery is recommended to correct vision in people who are near-sighted (myopia), or far-sighted (hyperopia), or have astigmatism.

In eyes with normal vision, the cornea bends (refracts) light precisely onto the retina at the back of the eye. But with myopia, hyperopia or astigmatism, the light is bent incorrectly, resulting in blurred vision.

Once the surgery is done, light focuses correctly on the retina, in the back of your eye, making vision clearer.

LASIK Procedure

During a LASIK surgery, a femtosecond laser is used to cut a flap in the cornea. The special type of cutting laser is programmed to precisely alter the shape of the dome-shaped clear tissue, or the cornea at the front of your eye. The flap is peeled back and another laser is used to reshape the tissue underneath. Pulses from a computer-controlled laser vaporize a portion of the stroma and the flap is then put back in place. The flap usually heals without any stitches.

During the surgery, you will be requested to focus on a point of light. Staring at this point helps to keep your eye fixed while the laser reshapes your cornea.

The above process takes between 20 – 30 minutes and can be performed under local anaesthesia (eye drops) that will numb the area. You will generally be awake during the surgery and can leave the clinic/ hospital in an hour or two.

Is LASIK Surgery right for you?

While LASIK surgery is good for a patient who wants to reduce her or his dependence on spectacles, there are certain conditions where it may not be the ideal procedure to undergo.

LASIK is not advisable for a person who is under the age of 18. Ophthalmic surgeons prefer to wait till a patient is over 21 years of age, so the eye has achieved the level of maturity desired before undergoing a surgical procedure.

LASIK is also not advised after the age of 40 because with advancing age, there may be a need to use reading glasses, so the purpose would be redundant.

LASIK is also not recommended for power above -10 to -12D as this can lead to significant corneal weakness, leading to problems later on

The surgery is not recommended if the patient is pregnant or nursing

LASIK is not advisable for a person who is taking certain medications

It is not recommended if the patient has had several recent changes in the vision prescription

Patients with thin or uneven corneas should not have LASIK surgery

LASIK is not advisable for people with eye conditions such as glaucoma or very dry eyes or other health issues such as diabetes, lupus, or rheumatoid arthritis

How to prepare for LASIK surgery

Find the right LASIK surgeon – It is important that you do your homework well and find the right surgeon to do your surgery. Check for prior experience and expertise in this kind of surgery. Check if the right kind of equipment is being used, whether it as per globally accepted standards. Clear all the questions that you have in your mind and be sure that you get answers that satisfy you.

Pre LASIK-evaluation is extremely important. Corneal thickness, corneal maps, pupil diameter, eye dryness, muscle balance etc. must be checked and they all need to be normal before even considering LASIK surgery

Share you complete medical history with your doctor – Be sure to disclose any medical illness, medication or allergies that you may be having

Stop wearing contact lenses a week to 10 days before the surgery, depending on the kind of contacts you use. You will need to wear spectacles instead, during this period. You doctor will guide you regarding this.

Abstain from alcohol or caffeine - Drinking alcohol or caffeine before LASIK surgery can be dehydrating. There are chances that it will interfere with medications used for the procedure, so refrain from alcohol on the day of surgery.

Eat a light meal on the day of your surgery, before going in, and take all of your prescribed medications

No makeup – Do not use eye makeup on the day of the surgery. Wash your eyes well before leaving home.

Post operation transportation – Though you will be discharged in a short time after the surgery, you will not be allowed to drive. So be sure to arrange for transport to take you home.

You will need to put eye drops at frequent regular intervals. If you can get someone to help you with this in the first couple of days, it would be ideal.

Wear an eye-guard. Keep your environment dust free and take care not to get fine dust, fibre or fur from your pet on your pillow or your face while you are sleeping

Stay away from very bright lights and glare for a few days. If possible, stay at home and rest your eye for two or three days at least.

Don't swim or use very hot bath water for 2 weeks after surgery

Be mentally prepared, because A) You will be awake during the procedure B) Your normal routine will have to change for a few days, while your eye heals from the surgery and things get back to normal C) Until your eyes get normal, be prepared for a little discomfort and a little blurry vision in the initial stages after the surgery.

Your doctor will brief you regarding follow-up visits and other protocols you must follow. Meanwhile, relax.