

GETTING A CLEARER PICTURE OF LASIK

For a long time now, eye procedure for vision improvement has been synonymous with LASIK, and rightfully so. Dr Nazila Binti Ahmad Azli, Consultant Ophthalmologist and Oculoplastic, Lacrimal & Orbital Surgeon at Ara Damansara Medical Centre paints a clearer picture of the technique and explains why it has persevered till date.

Since its approval in 1999, LASIK has hit the ground running, continuously evolving to adopt use of more mature technology, while consistently giving good and satisfying visual results. Although newer techniques have arrived in other parts of the world and even in Malaysia, LASIK remains the procedure of choice among doctors as well as patients, mainly due its status as one of the safest elective surgical procedures with the rate of complications from LASIK eye surgery estimated to be less than 1 per cent. A 2016 study in the Journal of Cataract & Refractive Surgery even revealed that LASIK has a 96 per cent patient satisfaction rate.

UNDERSTANDING LASIK

An acronym for 'laser in-situ keratomileusis', LASIK is a versatile refractive surgery that can correct vision in people who are near-sighted (myopic) or farsighted (hyperopic), or who have astigmatism. It improves the



patient's eyesight by reshaping the cornea, so that light entering the eye focuses more accurately on the retina at the back part of the eye for improved vision.

"This surgical procedure is one of the many vision correction surgeries that involve creating a very thin, superficial flap in

the cornea with a small surgical instrument called microkeratome or with a femtosecond laser. This hinged corneal layer is lifted back by the surgeon before an excimer laser reshapes the cornea to correct focus. An excimer laser produces a concentrated beam of cool ultraviolet (UV) light. Each

pulse of the laser can remove a tiny portion of corneal tissue. The protective flap is then repositioned to complete the procedure," explains Dr Nazila.

FITTING THE BILL

As an elective procedure, there are several criteria that doctors look out for in candidates before performing the surgery. These include being 18 years old and above with ocular maturity, stable vision for at least one year prior to the procedure with no change of prescription within two years, free of eye diseases or eye problems like lazy eye, ideal corneal thickness, and good general health.

"Candidates must also have a realistic expectation of LASIK's outcome. Patients with unrealistic or uninformed expectations for the procedure, recovery and results may not achieve their goals with an elective laser vision correction procedure like LASIK," adds Dr Nazila.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

Although it is a relatively painless procedure, LASIK is still associated with possible risks and complications similar to any surgery. Dr Nazila lists some of the common effects after the surgery that patients may experience.

"One of the possible effects is

dry eyes. LASIK surgery causes a temporary decrease in tear production, causing the eye to possibly feel dry as they heal in the first six months, reducing the quality of vision. Patients may also have difficulty seeing at night after surgery, which usually lasts a few days to a few weeks. They might notice increased light sensitivity, glare, halos around bright lights or double vision. Undercorrections and overcorrections happens when the laser removes too little tissue or too much from the eye respectively. Undercorrections are more common for people who are near-sighted with patient maybe needing another LASIK procedure within a year to remove more tissue, while overcorrections may be more difficult to fix. There is a chance of astigmatism too, caused by uneven tissue removal. It may require additional surgery, glasses or contact lenses. One of the possible complications is regression, when the vision slowly changes back towards the original prescription," Dr Nazila describes.

RECOVERING AFTER LASIK

Proper recovery practice after LASIK

is crucial for the effectiveness of the procedure. The surgeon will prescribe eyedrops to prevent infection and inflammation, as well as drops to keep the eyes moist. Patients are advised to have a good nap after coming home from the procedure and to keep the eyes protected with sunglasses when going out and plastic eye shields when sleeping.

Patients are also recommended to wait one to three days after surgery before normal daily activities resume. For the first week after LASIK surgery, avoid dust, smoke, yard and garden work, and eye make-up or creams. Patients may wash face and bathe as usual but must avoid getting soap and water into the eyes. Avoid swimming, hot tubbing or more vigorous sports for two weeks while contact sports must be avoided for a month.

"It is the first four hours after LASIK procedure that are the most uncomfortable. In the recovery period, patient may feel like there is something in the eye. It is important to remember during LASIK recovery time, not to rub the eyes as this could dislodge the corneal flap," advises Dr Nazila. ©



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