

So Is LASIK Eye Surgery Safe, Or What?

A *New York Times* report claims LASIK can lead to permanent visual side effects, which have led patients to become depressed and even suicidal.

BY EMILY SHIFFER | JUN 15, 2018



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- A *New York Times* report has highlighted the potential risks and side effects of LASIK surgery, a procedure that helps correct vision problems and reduces the need to wear glasses or contacts
- LASIK involves cutting into the cornea and sculpting a portion of it to correct vision problems
- Potential long-term side effects highlighted by the *New York Times* include blurred or double vision, burning, dry eyes, and light sensitivity, but some ophthalmologists say these are rare and the surgery is largely safe and effective.

When LASIK eye surgery first received FDA approval in the late 90s, it was viewed as something of a miracle procedure, as people with vision problems were thrilled by the prospect of no longer needing to wear glasses or contact lenses. But a recent *New York Times* report has raised serious questions about the safety of the procedure.

The story featured testimonials from patients who experienced short and long-term complications, such as blurred or double vision, burning, dry eyes, and light sensitivity. Some of these side effects reportedly lasted for years after the procedure.

The article also cited a bevy of studies, including an FDA study called the "LASIK Quality of Life Collaboration Project." The report found that while 95% of patients were satisfied with their vision following the surgery, a handful of patients suffered serious side effects, such as seeing starbursts, glare, or permanent halos. In some of these cases, this led to depression, job loss, and even suicide.

So should you think twice before getting LASIK surgery? Or are these claims overblown? We talked to ophthalmologists all over the country to find out.

Original Article found here: <https://www.menshealth.com/health/a21562470/lasik-eye-surgery-risks/>



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What is LASIK eye surgery?

It's a simple, two-step laser procedure that takes less than 15 minutes.

"LASIK is approved to treat all three of the major reasons patients wear glasses: nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism," says Eric Donnenfeld, M.D., past president, American Society for Cataract and Refractive Surgery.

The first step of the procedure is to make a thin, circular flap in the cornea, or the surface of the eye. In the second step, a laser is used to "sculpt the patient's cornea to correct the patient's vision problems," says Donnenfeld. "The flap is then laid back in place to act as a natural bandage and protect the reshaped portion of the cornea while it heals."

The procedure is incredibly popular, says Ronald Krueger, MD, ophthalmologist at the Cleveland Clinic. "Over 9 million people have had LASIK surgery done over the last 20 years," he tells *MensHealth.com*. And recovery time is short: "I usually tell patients that they should be able to drive themselves to their follow-up appointment the next day."

Are there any LASIK risks or side effects?

"Choosing LASIK, or any elective procedure, should be carefully considered and making an informed decision is important. The first step should be to determine if you are a candidate for the procedure – not everyone one is, and there are other laser vision correction options that might be better suited to your vision, anatomy and lifestyle," says Donnenfeld.

You could be a bad candidate for the procedure if you have a weak cornea. "One in 2,000 people have a structurally weaker cornea," says Dr. Krueger. Since the surgery is intended to change the shape of the cornea, if it is structurally weak to begin with it that could cause long-term problems.

If you have cataracts, you also might not be an ideal candidate for the procedure. "LASIK surgery will help your vision if you have cataracts or not. However, your cataracts may grow over time, which would require cataract surgery," says Krueger.

But even if you are a good candidate for the procedure, you *should* expect to experience short-term side effects after having LASIK.

"During the initial recovery period, which generally lasts less than a day, your eyes may feel slightly uncomfortable, dry, light-sensitive, or irritated," says Donnenfeld. "Some patients experience side effects from LASIK which generally include night vision symptoms, such as glare, halos, ghosting, and starbursts."

These symptoms are common in the first few days after surgery, but it's pretty rare for them to last much longer than that, Krueger and Donnenfeld note.

Is it safe to have LASIK?

Like any surgery, LASIK does come with risks. But there are many studies that point to its long-term effectiveness. One study that looked at patients three months after the surgery found that the majority have better quality of vision without glasses than they did with their best glasses before the operation.

Other encouraging news? A 2015 study found that eye surgeons who perform LASIK surgeries were significantly more likely to have it done on themselves. Translation: these guys believe in their surgeries so much, they have it done on themselves.

Bottom line: while the new report has slightly rattled potential patients, many in the ophthalmology world are still confident in the procedure.

"While there is no surgery without risk, the risk with LASIK is extremely low and side effects can overwhelmingly be addressed and symptoms managed," says Donnenfeld.