



MAGAZINE

The Pulse of Today's Health

LASIK SURGERY: Envision the possibilities

[how much do you really know about ...]

BY VIRGINIA J. PILLSBURY

It's essential to cut through the hype - promises and embellishments - and learn exactly what it is, what it promises, how to know if you are a good candidate and, most importantly, how to choose the best surgeon for you.

Arun Gulani, M.D., a local ophthalmologist and founder of the Gulani Vision Institute, is a world-renown expert in LASIK surgery. He says, often complications from the surgery occur when the necessary groundwork before surgery isn't covered.

Laser vision surgery comes under the ophthalmology umbrella of refractive surgery. Simply, it is performed with a laser instrument used to reshape the cornea, the "window" of the eye, according to the glasses prescription of the patient. The surgeon makes a flap in the cornea, reshapes it with the laser, and replaces the flap. "It's an exquisite surgical technique within the confines of the cornea," says Gulani. Calling the laser "an extremely accurate and elegant knife," Gulani says that it's so precise it can etch into a single strand of hair.



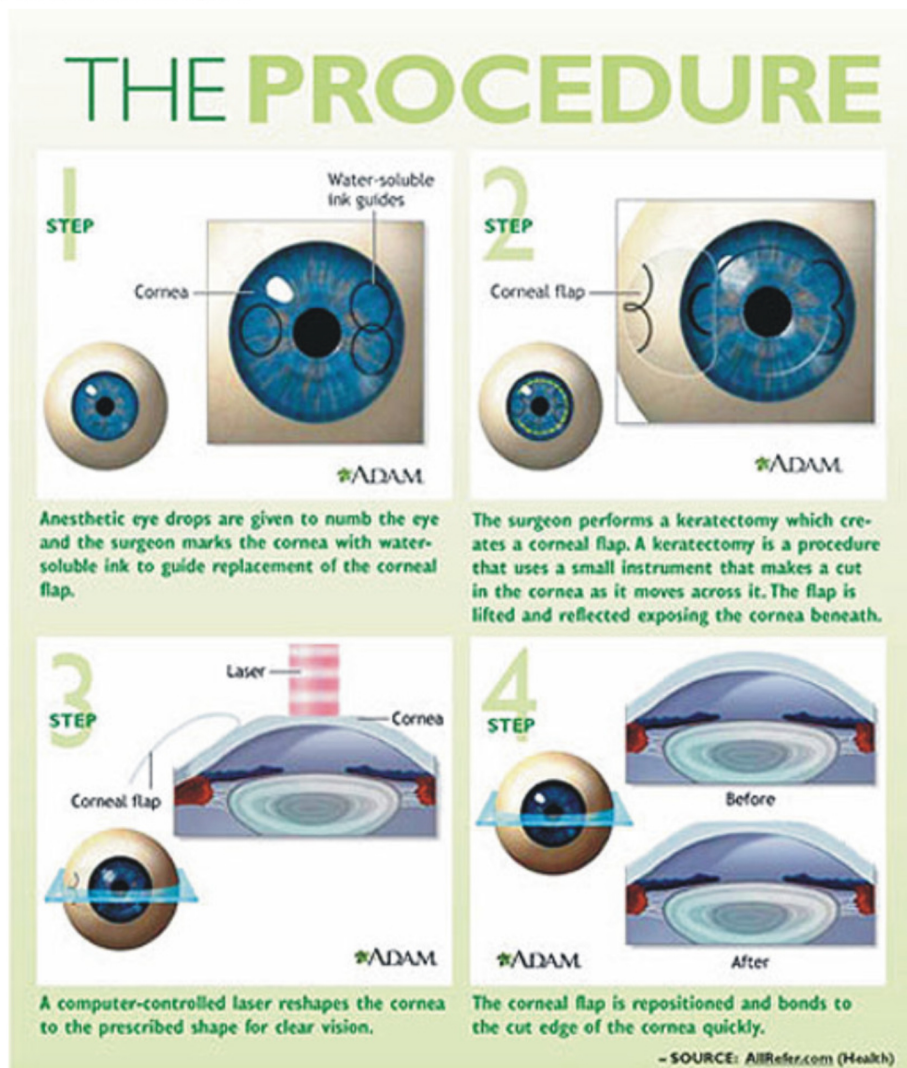
Do you fumble for your glasses in the morning just to see the clock?

The surgery usually takes a few minutes with the patient awake, active and participating. Only numbing drops are used in the patient's eyes. This method provides rapid healing and quick results. Visual recovery is generally fast and most patients gain driving recovery the day after surgery.

Of the refractive surgery methods used, LASIK is the most popular. The shape of the cornea contributes to the refractive error of the visual system. If the cornea is too steep or curved, it produces a nearsighted error; if it is too flat, it produces a farsighted error; and if it is football shaped, the error is astigmatism.

Making a decision

"LASIK surgery is an extremely fast procedure with usually quick, good results," says Gulani, who is experienced in more than 20 refractive surgery procedures. "This is very attractive to the consumer. It does a predictable and safe job."



With all the hype in LASIK advertisements today such as the promise of the latest technology, unbelievable promotional offers, celebrity testimonials, financing deals and more, what's the best way for a consumer to choose the right physician?

Gulani says it's all about researching for the right surgeon. "A well-informed patient is a well-prepared patient," says Gulani. "The surgeon makes a difference in consistent outcomes since LASIK technology has reached a foolproof stage."

Also, it's important that the patient is comfortable about the surgery and everything that will ensue. Gulani suggests the following when choosing a surgeon:

Go online to a general search engine and type in the physician's name. What comes up, a Web site with advertising claims? Or, do you find interviews, publications, articles, and third party confirmation?

Determine your surgeon's reputation locally and nationally in the field of LASIK surgery.

Does the surgeon perform the full spectrum of vision corrective surgeries, not just LASIK, so the surgery best suited for your needs will be offered rather than having only one choice due to the surgeon's limited capabilities?

When meeting with your surgeon, ask direct questions about before, during and after surgery care. Also, ask about various other options and if any are better suited for you.

Make sure you are addressed as an individual and not as a number on a conveyer belt. You should feel comfortable with your surgeon's answers, commitment, reputation and abilities.

Ask to speak with patients who have had surgery at the practice and specifically those that are your age, gender, and have the same refractive error and ocular status. Generic results and advertising materials pertaining to national studies may not necessarily represent individual practices.

Determine if your surgeon is capable of handling any LASIK complications if any were to arise. If so, ask for evidence before surgery rather than after surgery when it might be too late.

As with any surgery, complications may occur. However, complications in LASIK surgery are usually limited to the cornea.

The candidate

An ideal candidate for LASIK surgery is more than 18 years old and has a stable refractive error - meaning, his or her eye measurements have been unchanged for at least a year. There should be no ocular pathology such as corneal diseases, inadequate lid closure, dry eye, or retinal disease.

Patients with collagen vascular diseases or uncontrolled diabetes are at greater risk, although there are steps that can be taken to treat and circumvent the condition. "Overall health of the patient is important," says Gulani. "The patient is not just an eyeball."

He says the best way he determines a candidate for LASIK or other refractive surgeries is to look at the health of the entire eye: conducts a systemic examination to look for arthritis, collagen vascular disease, uncontrolled diabetes, nerve palsy, or autoimmune diseases such as lupus. Also, he conducts a patient profile to find out if the patient's expectations are realistic, and looks for options in various kinds of laser vision surgery that may work better for a patient's individual needs or for patients with previous eye surgeries.



It's estimated 1 of every 20 contact lens wearers develops a contact-lens related complication each year. The latest developments with LASIK surgery can help eliminate the problem.