

Going into LASIK with open eyes – a checklist of what to do

If you are preparing for LASIK surgery, know you are in good company – enough to fill a city, in fact.

The number of LASIK surgeries performed in the United States is expected to reach about 600,000 in 2016,¹ roughly the population of Milwaukee. That shakes out to one in 542 Americans. Yet despite the increasing population of recipients, many who schedule LASIK likely feel anxious about what to expect and how to prepare. It is eye surgery, after all.

So let's replace uncertainty with information. First, a definition of LASIK: It is an outpatient laser vision surgery that reshapes the cornea, the clear covering on the front of the eye. This reshaping enables the cornea to focus light rays clearly on the retina, so the patient can see things better. LASIK is performed to repair vision in people who are nearsighted, farsighted or have astigmatism (blurry vision).^{2, 3}

While LASIK is common, lots of patients are a little fuzzy on what to expect. Here's a checklist of what to do pre- and post-surgery.

1

PRE-CHECK 1: CLOSE CONTACTS

If you wear contact lenses, it is essential to take them out and wear eyeglasses instead for at least a few weeks before the procedure. Contact lenses can distort your cornea, which could cause incorrect measurements for the procedure. If you want the laser to be a hit, ask your doctor for guidelines and err on the side of caution.⁴

2

PRE-CHECK 2: SAY "HI" TO THE SURGEON

Before the procedure you will meet the eye surgeon or a coordinator. This visit is to evaluate your medical history as well as examine your eyes fully. Corneal thickness, pupil dilation and air pressure are among the common (and pain-free) tests. Bring your glasses so the prescription can be reviewed.⁵

3

PRE-CHECK 3: SCREEN MEDICATIONS

Prepare for the eye surgeon a full list of all the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter ones. And we mean a full list – some acne medications and even decongestants may cause LASIK complications.⁶ Also alert the surgeon to all allergies.

4

PRE-CHECK 4: KEEP IT NATURAL

On the evening before (or morning of) the surgery, remove all cosmetics, creams, lotions and perfume. Mascara and other makeup could increase your risk of infection during the surgery. Lotions and perfumes, meanwhile, can interfere with the function of the laser.⁷

Going into LASIK with open eyes – a checklist of what to do

5

PRE-CHECK 5: GET A RIDE

Arrange to have a ride home. Before the procedure you will be given numbing eye drops and possibly medication to relax. Immediately after the surgery your eyes may itch or burn. In short, you don't want to be on the road. LASIK surgery normally takes less than 30 minutes to perform on both eyes, so plan accordingly.⁸

6

POST-CHECK 1: EXPECT A LITTLE HAZINESS

Right after the surgery you might experience light sensitivity, bloodshot eyes, glare and hazy vision. You might also see starbursts or halos. Don't be alarmed. These symptoms are normal and will improve over a few days. If you see leprechauns, however, call a doctor.⁹

7

POST-CHECK 2: EYES WIDE SHUT

Try to keep your eyes closed as much as possible for six or more hours after the surgery. This is to protect your eyes as well as to prevent you from rubbing them. If you rub your eyes, it could cause the laser-created flap in your cornea to move and compromise the surgery results. You'll likely get an eye shield or patch to protect the surgery area until it heals (usually overnight).¹⁰

8

POST-CHECK 3: GET SHADY

Your post-surgery eyes will be dry and super-sensitive. Protect them against UV rays with sunglasses and use the eye drops provided as prescribed. Some drops will simply improve dryness while others will include antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. Also, no makeup for two to four weeks. Sorry.^{11, 12}

9

POST-CHECK 4: GIVE THE GYM BAG A BREAK

Ask your doctor, but you will likely have to pass on jogging and other low-impact sports for one to three days after surgery. Competitive sports that can cause eye injuries will likely have to be skipped for at least two weeks. Also avoid swimming pools, hot tubs and whirlpools, which can lead to eye infections.¹³

10

POST-CHECK 5: FOLLOW UP

The eye surgeon's office will schedule a follow-up appointment with you to examine your eyes and vision, likely one or two days after the procedure. However, if you experience acute pain, or if the post-surgery side effects worsen, don't wait for the appointment. Call your doctor right away.¹⁴

¹Statista.com, www.statista.com/statistics/271478/number-of-lasik-surgeries-in-the-us/

²LASIK Eye Surgery, The Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/lasik-eye-surgery/in-depth/lasik-surgery/art-20045751

³LASIK eye surgery, MedlinePlus, www.medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007018.htm

⁴LASIK Eye Surgery, The Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/lasik-eye-surgery/basics/how-you-prepare/prc-20019041

⁵LASIK Eye Surgery, WebMD, www.webmd.com/eye-health/lasik-laser-eye-surgery#1

⁶"Medications which May Affect LASIK Surgery," LasikEyeSurgeryCorrection.com, www.lasikeyesurgerycorrection.com/medications_affect_lasik.html

⁷LASIK Eye Surgery, MedicineNet.com, www.medicinenet.com/lasik_eye_surgery/page8.htm

⁸Ibid.

⁹LASIK eye surgery, MedlinePlus, www.medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007018.htm

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹LASIK Eye Surgery, WebMD, www.webmd.com/eye-health/lasik-laser-eye-surgery#2

¹²LASIK eye surgery, MedlinePlus, www.medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007018.htm

¹³LASIK Eye Surgery, MedicineNet.com, www.medicinenet.com/lasik_eye_surgery/page8.htm

¹⁴LASIK eye surgery, MedlinePlus, www.medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007018.htm