

# How-To

## Select a LASIK Surgeon

### In General

If you suffer from nearsightedness, farsightedness and/or Astigmatism, then LASIK surgery may be for you. While LASIK (Laser-Assisted In Situ Keratomileusis) doesn't always result in perfect vision, says the Eye Surgery Education Council (ESEC), it can allow people to more freely pursue their hobbies, physical activities and careers without the dependency of their contact lenses and glasses.

It's a lifetime investment – and one with many benefits. In order to successfully free yourself from contacts and glasses, it's important to know what to expect, and to find an experienced surgeon whom you can trust with your windows to the world.

### What is LASIK?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says LASIK is a procedure that permanently changes the shape of the cornea – the clear covering on the front of the eye that helps focus light to create images on your retina – by using an excimer laser. During the surgery, the IntraLase FS Laser or a mechanical hand held device called a Microkeratome is used to create a corneal flap. Once the corneal flap is created the surgeon then is able to lift and lay the flap back followed by pulses from the excimer laser that vaporize a portion of the corneal tissue to reshape its curvature. After treatment, the corneal flap is placed back into its original position. The result is corrected vision.

"The speed, precision and safety of the both the IntraLase FS Laser and the Visx Star S4 Excimer Laser is a huge advantage today," explains Dr. Stephen Schuster from Schuster Eye Center in El Paso, Texas. Dr. Schuster is the first and most experienced LASIK surgeon to offer the IntraLase FS Laser in El Paso. "It was important for us to be able to offer our patients the Safest LASIK – the IntraLase FS Laser is the most precise method of creating a corneal flap," explained Betty Briano, Vision Coordinator for Schuster Eye Center.

### Am I a candidate?

Patients can be 18 or 80 years old, as long as they're healthy, Dr. Schuster says. The Eye Surgery Education Council says an ideal LASIK candidate is at least 18 years old. The refractive error with contacts must be unchanged or stable for two years before treatment; has sufficient corneal thickness; is affected by a common vision problem; and doesn't suffer from a disease (vision-related or otherwise) that could complicate the surgery.

As with any surgery, there are risks and complications to consider. Some patients can lose vision; develop glare, halos and/or double vision; be under or over corrected, requiring additional treatment or the continued use of contacts or glasses; develop severe dry eye syndrome or have results diminish with age, according to the FDA.

"Most problems are flap complications which occur during the making of the corneal flap, however, this occurs mostly inexperienced surgeons: Dr. Schuster says. "Problems, such as double vision and under or over correction, can usually be fixed."

### Finding a surgeon

Dr. Schuster advises becoming "a critical consumer of health care," in your search for an experienced, qualified surgeon. Do your homework; Research Web sites about LASIK, such as [www.lasikinstitute.org](http://www.lasikinstitute.org) and schedule consultations with more than one surgeon so you can compare and determine which one offers not only the best technology but where you feel most comfortable and safe," Dr. Schuster says.

But there's no substitute for experience; according to the Eye Surgery Education Council, several studies have shown there's a learning curve associated with the surgery. The more procedures a surgeon has done, the better he or she will be at it. "A surgeon who's done 5000 refractive surgeries, and has eight or nine years of experience is a lot better than getting a cheap fix," Dr. Schuster says.

Check surgeons' credentials – you'll want to go to a board certified, licensed ophthalmologist who's had extensive training in refractive surgery. The surgeon should also have manufacturer certification on lasers, which should be FDA-approved. Contact the American Board of Ophthalmology at [www.abop.org](http://www.abop.org) for information on certified surgeons in your area. Ask friends and family if they can recommend a surgeon based on personal experience.

Interview possible surgeons to see who suits your preferences; do you prefer going to a strictly refractive surgery center or a full-service ophthalmic practice? Do you feel comfortable with the surgeon, and his or her staff? Is the facility comfortable and clean? Does the surgeon offer patient references? Schuster gives potential patients a packet of educational materials, which he wrote himself.

### What to expect?

Once you find a surgeon with whom you feel comfortable, the first step is to schedule a dilated eye evaluation, during which you'll receive a comprehensive eye examination. The surgeon who will perform the surgery should do this. You need to be certain the surgeon knows your eyes totally and is not relying on another doctor's findings. You can't wear soft or hard contacts for one or two weeks (depending on the type of contact lenses your wearing) prior to your dilated eye exam and pre-operative evaluation. The surgeon will also perform a number of special tests to determine your candidacy. These tests may be delegated to technicians or ancillary personnel, but should always be reviewed by you and treating surgeons together.

Many surgeons, including as Dr. Schuster, allow patients to observe the procedure from a viewing room to get a better idea of what is involved and is expected.

The surgery lasts approximately 20 minutes and, on average, costs \$4,500 to \$5,000 for both eyes, says Dr. Schuster. Discomfort is minimal and you should be able to get back to your normal routine within 24-48 hours. And with the technology today, many walk out with 20/20 vision or better, and more than 98 percent achieve 20/40 or better, according to the Eye Surgery Education Council. You may still need to wear glasses or contact lenses for some activities, such as reading. Ask your surgeon what results he or she plans to achieve with your eyes. Realistic expectations are vital to patient satisfaction.

### The Eye Surgery Education Council recommends asking surgeons these questions when considering LASIK:

How many LASIK procedures have you performed?

Do you provide a list of patients I can contact?

What's your complication rate?

What laser do you use? Is it FDA-approved?

What pre-operative diagnostic tests will you perform?

May I observe a surgery?

Are you licensed and board-certified? Are you a member of any professional associations?

What's your re-treatment rate?