



# LASER EYE SURGERY

## IS LASER EYE SURGERY SAFE?

Laser eye surgery has been performed for over 30 years and is one of the safest elective surgical procedures available today. LASIK and ASLA have been studied extensively and there is a wealth of clinical evidence showing that these procedures are safe and effective in suitable candidates.

### Over 16 million people have had LASIK

Thousands of studies around the world have analysed the safety and effectiveness of LASIK for correcting refractive errors, such as short-sightedness, long-sightedness and astigmatism. A recent review evaluating 97 of the best-designed LASIK studies (including 67,893 LASIK-treated eyes) found that:

- More than 90% of patients had perfect results (i.e. 20/20 vision or better, also known as 6/6 vision in Australia), and nearly 100% had vision that meets the Australian legal driving requirements (6/12 vision).<sup>1</sup>
- Less than 1% of patients lost clarity of vision of two or more lines on the eye chart (known as corrected distance visual acuity).<sup>1</sup>
- Up to 99% of patients were extremely happy with their outcome.<sup>1</sup>

### ASLA is as safe and effective as LASIK

It is important to note that LASIK is not a suitable procedure for all eyes. For example, ASLA is more likely to be recommended for thin corneas, as LASIK can increase the risk of complications in these patients. ASLA has been around longer than LASIK, but it is used for fewer patients because it has a longer recovery time. However, studies have shown that patients who have ASLA can expect safety and outcomes comparable to LASIK.<sup>2</sup>

### The risks of side-effects and complications are low

Most issues that can arise after laser eye surgery resolve in the short term. However, it is important to understand the potential risks, which include:

- **Over- or under-correction of your refractive error:** this means that your vision is not perfect after the procedure. In almost all cases, this can be corrected by an 'enhancement' procedure (or by wearing glasses or contact lenses).
- **Loss of visual sharpness:** approximately 1–2% of people may experience this while their vision is stabilising after surgery, but it normally resolves within 6 months.



- **Dry eye:** this is normal for a few weeks or months after surgery but does not usually persist. LASIK is most likely to cause this side-effect, so ASLA may be recommended instead for patients with dry eye.
- **Flap problems:** the flap of corneal tissue that is lifted and replaced during LASIK can move out of place after surgery if you rub your eyes, swim or play sports too soon. You can help avoid this by following your post-operative recovery instructions.

### Serious complications are very rare

One of the most common fears associated with laser eye surgery is going blind, but you may find it reassuring to know that blindness has never occurred from one of these procedures in Australia.

Severe visual impairment can occur if an eye infection arising from surgery is not treated or managed properly. For this reason, it is important to choose an experienced surgeon, and a clinic with the latest technology, to greatly reduce your risk of complications.

### Be sure that laser eye surgery is safe for you

If your eyes are not suited to laser eye surgery, it may not be possible to achieve the outcomes you were expecting. An experienced surgeon will undertake a comprehensive evaluation to understand your eyes before recommending any treatment. It is important to take the advice of your surgeon if laser eye surgery is not recommended.

**References** 1. Sandoval HP, Donnenfeld ED, Kohnen T *et al.* Modern laser in situ keratomileusis outcomes. *J Cataract Refract Surg* 2016;42(8):1224–34. 2. O'Bart D. Excimer laser surface ablation: a review of recent literature. *Clin Exp Optom* 2014;97:12–17.

All medical and surgical procedures have potential complications. Check with your doctor before proceeding.