



**FOCUS ON**

# **LASER EYE SURGERY**

More than 20 million people around the world have had laser eye surgery since it was first introduced in 1991.<sup>1–3</sup>

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# BASIC ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

**If you use glasses and/or contact lenses, you've probably considered laser eye surgery and wondered if you are eligible.**

At Vision Eye Institute we offer a range of assessment options to help you find out if you're eligible, including free, no-obligation initial assessments with an optometrist or orthoptist, virtual consultations and comprehensive consultations.

We also understand that some people prefer to have an idea of their eligibility before booking an appointment. That's why we've put together a list of the basic eligibility criteria for laser eye surgery:

- You are between 18 and 55\* years of age
- You suffer from long-sightedness, short-sightedness, astigmatism and/or presbyopia
- Your eyes are healthy and you do not have a history of eye problems (e.g. scarring or thinning of the cornea) or significant eye trauma
- Your glasses/contact lens prescription has remained stable for 12 months
- You are not pregnant or breastfeeding

If you meet the above criteria, you may be eligible for laser eye surgery.

\*Patients over 45 may still be eligible for laser eye surgery. However, we recommend booking a comprehensive assessment to discuss other vision correction procedures that may better suit your needs.

The next step is to book in for a free, no-obligation assessment with one of our orthoptists or optometrists. Key tests will be performed to check the health of your eyes, confirm that your prescription falls in the treatable range and indicate which corrective procedure is appropriate for your situation.



## Cost

As a rough guide, laser eye surgery can cost up to \$3700 per eye. When comparing laser vision correction with a lifetime of glasses or contact lenses, you might be surprised to find out which is the more cost-effective option.

# CHOOSING A LASER EYE SURGEON

**Many people find this a daunting task, especially how and where to begin.**

At this stage, remember to focus on the suitability of the surgeon to perform the procedure and important information about the procedure itself (other questions about the procedure, such as what to expect on the day of surgery, can come later).

The questions in the adjacent box will help you gather information about the qualifications and experience of the surgeon and how willing they are to discuss what is involved and potential benefits and risks. You should also gain an understanding of the facilities, equipment and sterile practices at the clinic.

## COMPARING COST IS DIFFICULT WHEN IT COMES TO COMPLEX PROCEDURES LIKE EYE SURGERY

Cost is obviously a major factor for laser eye surgery. Always clarify whether the cost is for one or both eyes and make sure you know exactly what is included in the fee. It is important to make sure you are comparing like with like, but this is often difficult when it comes to complex procedures like eye surgery, where factors such as surgeon experience, success rate, equipment and access to aftercare are vital.

It's not possible to put a price on your vision so make sure you do your homework thoroughly. Check if you're unsure about something. Even though laser eye surgery is very safe, all surgical procedures have potential benefits and risks.

You might find it helpful to bring a family member or friend along to the appointment and to take notes that you can refer back to afterwards.

## Questions that you should ask potential surgeons/clinics:

- Are you registered with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists?
- How many laser eye surgeries have you performed and what is your success rate?
- Are there other treatment options and is this surgery the most appropriate option for me?
- What is the optimal age for me to have laser eye surgery?
- What are the potential complications from this surgery? Are there ways to treat these complications if they arise?
- If an enhancement is required, will there be any extra cost?
- What type of lasers do you use and why?
- What type of anaesthesia do you use?
- What is the post-operative recovery period?
- Is your facility fully accredited, do you use sterile practices and are you adequately staffed?
- How much do you charge for laser eye surgery and what exactly is included in the fee? Does this include a post-operative review and after-hours care in case of emergencies?
- If I am concerned following the surgery, how easy is it for me to contact you?



# THE PRE-SURGICAL CONSULTATION

**A comprehensive consultation is necessary to determine if you are suitable for laser eye surgery and which procedure is most appropriate for you. If you choose to have a free refractive suitability assessment, you will still need to see a surgeon for a comprehensive eye examination prior to surgery.**

Remember to let your surgeon/optometrist know of any eye-related health issues, together with more general health concerns or problems. Also specify what medications, if any, you take on a regular basis, as well as medications you may be allergic to.

During the pre-surgical assessment, you will undergo a comprehensive eye examination so that your surgeon can evaluate your vision and establish whether you are suitable for laser eye surgery. This includes several easy and painless tests such as vision and prescription testing; an eye pressure test; and a dilated eye exam, if required. Your surgeon will then assess the health of your eyes and confirm your degree of refractive error (i.e. the strength of your glasses prescription).

They will also evaluate the shape, contour and thickness of your cornea, and check for the presence of any irregularities. This information will be used to determine the laser eye surgery procedure most appropriate for your situation and the precise amount of corneal tissue that needs to be removed to bring your vision back to normal (or as close as possible).

During the consultation, the surgeon will advise you of the benefits and risks of laser eye surgery and provide specific details about the procedure that best suits your needs. This is also an opportunity for you to clarify your visual expectations and ask any questions you may have about the procedure.

SMILE® is a registered trademark of Carl Zeiss Meditec

## LASIK

LASIK is the most common type of laser eye surgery. It is suitable for patients with regular-shaped corneas and adequate corneal thickness. LASIK can be used to treat short-sightedness (myopia), long-sightedness (hyperopia) and astigmatism.

## PRK

PRK (also known as ASLA) may be the recommended treatment if your corneas are irregular or too thin.

## SMILE®

SMILE\* is an alternative procedure for patients with regular-shaped corneas. It is particularly suited to patients with a high degree of short-sightedness; individuals with a history of ocular surface conditions, such as dry eye; and athletes who play contact sports.

\*SMILE is only available in NSW.



# WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY OF SURGERY

## What actually takes place on the day of your procedure?

### Before surgery

Before coming to the clinic for your surgery, you need to follow our preparation guidelines. You can expect to be in the clinic for around two to three hours, and in the laser suite for approximately 20 minutes. If you need laser eye surgery on both eyes, this will generally be done on the same day.

Prior to the surgery, anaesthetic eye drops will be applied to numb your eyes. You will also be offered a mild oral sedative to help relax you before the procedure – this medication is optional and you may decline if you do not wish to take it. After allowing a short time for the sedative to work, you will be shown to the laser suite.

### During surgery

Before you enter the laser suite, the laser will have been pre-programmed to correct your refractive error. Your surgeon will talk to you throughout the process so you know where to look and what to expect.

Once you are lying flat on the bed, the laser will be positioned so it is directly in line with the eye being operated on. A small device (also known as a 'speculum' or 'lid holder') will be fitted to your eye to hold your lids open and stop you from blinking. The laser has an infrared eye-tracker that measures and compensates for any eye movement during the procedure.

Your surgeon will let you know when the procedure is about to start.





## LASIK

LASIK is a two-step vision correction procedure. In the first step, the surgeon creates a flap in the top layer of the cornea, exposing the tissue bed underneath – you may feel slight pressure during this stage. In the second step, an excimer laser is used to reshape the cornea. As the laser moves across the cornea, you may feel a slight sensation but no pain. Once reshaping is complete, the surgeon gently replaces the corneal flap and the healing process begins immediately.

## PRK

During PRK, the surgeon will gently remove the top layer of corneal cells. This may be done using a brush, alcohol solution, or with the laser (this is known as 'transPRK'). An excimer laser is then used to reshape the corneal tissue. During the laser step, you may feel a slight sensation but no pain. Afterwards, a 'bandage' contact lens is placed on top of the eye to aid the healing process.

## SMILE

SMILE involves using one laser to prepare and reshape the cornea. The surgeon uses a femtosecond laser to create a 3 mm keyhole entry point. Next, the laser creates a precise lens-shaped disc of tissue within the cornea. This disc of tissue (called a lenticule) is then removed through the keyhole incision. During the procedure, you may feel some pressure or mild discomfort but no pain.

Following the laser procedure for the first eye, the lid holder will be removed and the procedure repeated on your second eye (if required).

Ultimately, all three techniques achieve the same result – that is, restoring your vision by correcting your specific refractive error.



## After surgery

Once the laser procedure is complete, you will be helped off the bed and led into the recovery room. You may be able to see distant objects, but your vision will be blurry – this is normal. Depending on the procedure, you may need to remain in the recovery room for around half an hour to allow your eyes to adjust and the effects of the sedative to wear off (if taken).

When it is time to be discharged, you will need a friend or relative to accompany you. You will not be able to drive yourself home as your vision will be slightly blurry for several hours after surgery. Once home, it is important that you rest for the remainder of the day.

# RECOVERING AFTER SURGERY

## The recovery period is different for LASIK, PRK and SMILE.

How fast your eyes recover after surgery depends on the type of laser vision correction procedure you have had. You will be discharged with eye drops (artificial tears, anti-inflammatory drops and antibiotic drops) and medication to help your recovery, along with goggles or eye shields to prevent you from accidentally touching your eyes while you sleep. Your surgeon will tell you how long you should continue to use your eye drops for. You can expect to use them for approximately three to four weeks.

### LASIK

LASIK has the fastest recovery period and most patients notice significant visual improvement within a day. This is because the procedure doesn't disturb the top layer of the cornea, rather a flap is folded back and the layers beneath are lasered. Once the flap is replaced, vision stabilises quickly.

Your first review appointment will take place later the same day, or the next day. During this appointment, we will check you are recovering well from your surgery. You should allow one or two days for your vision to settle. Once your eyes are comfortable, you can visit the relevant licensing centre (e.g. Service NSW, VicRoads, TMR) to re-sit the visual exam and update the conditions of your driver's license.

You'll be able to resume most activities the day after surgery. However, you must wait two weeks before swimming and a month before playing contact sports. You should avoid rubbing your eyes and wearing eye makeup for one week.

Though recovery is very quick, it's normal to experience some symptoms that may cause minor discomfort after LASIK. The procedure can reduce tear production, so your eyes may feel dry and/or gritty during the recovery period. The eye drops you are discharged with will relieve these symptoms. In the days and weeks after surgery, you may also experience fluctuating vision and see halos around lights, which should eventually pass. Some people also experience light sensitivity for up to a week – wearing sunglasses can help. Overall, for most patients, the recovery from LASIK is very fast with little or no discomfort.



### PRK

The recovery from PRK is slower and more uncomfortable than the other procedures because your cornea needs to grow a new layer of cells. Your eyes are likely to be very uncomfortable and sensitive for the first few days after surgery, but this will gradually subside as the cornea heals. A bandage contact lens is worn to protect the cornea during healing and you'll be given non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drops and oral pain relief medication to help manage the discomfort.

You will have a post-operative consultation within 1–5 days after surgery to remove the



bandage contact lens. Your eye will feel a lot better after the bandage contact lens is removed, but you may still experience some discomfort for up to a week.

It is also normal to experience dry eye during the first two to three weeks after PRK. Artificial tear drops will alleviate symptoms and help your eyes recover.

After PRK, vision can take a week or two to become functional enough for everyday activities. You may feel able to restart some visual activities the day after surgery. However, most people find it uncomfortable, so it's advisable to plan for some activities that allow you to rest your eyes (e.g. podcasts, audiobooks) for the first few days. It generally takes around a week to return to activities such as work, wearing eye makeup, exercise and swimming. You must avoid playing contact sports for 2–4 weeks. Your doctor will tell you when it is safe to drive, which is normally within one to two weeks.

Though it takes longer to recover after PRK, patients have great visual outcomes once vision stabilises.

## SMILE

After SMILE, the surfaces of the corneal flap and the underlying cornea need to heal, so it typically takes two or three days for your eyes to recover and reach clear vision.

You will need to visit your surgeon for a post-operative consultation either later the same day or the next day. You should allow one or two days for your vision to settle. Once your eyes are comfortable, you can visit Service NSW to re-sit the visual exam and update the conditions of your driver's license.

The recovery after SMILE is painless. SMILE causes less disturbance to the corneal nerves than LASIK and PRK, so it is less likely that patients will experience dry eye or gritty sensations after surgery. Some light sensitivity and fluctuating vision is normal and will resolve within a few weeks.

After SMILE, you can return to everyday activities, such as light exercise, household chores and using a computer, within a few days after surgery. Some tasks that require critical vision (e.g. reading fine print, driving at night) may be difficult during the first few days. On day five after surgery, all activities can be resumed. This includes getting water in your eyes, swimming, physical activities, contact sports, wearing eye makeup and using eye creams. Indeed, many people choose SMILE because of the quick return to contact sports.

While visual recovery after SMILE takes slightly longer than LASIK, it is still fast and this procedure gives you the freedom to resume sports and all other activities only five days after the procedure.

## Follow-up consultations

Further check-ups will be scheduled in the months following your surgery to keep track of your recovery and monitor your vision once it has stabilised. In a small number of patients, a second (enhancement) procedure may be recommended to further improve vision. If required, this is usually performed approximately six months after the initial procedure.

## Enjoy your new eyes

After the different recovery periods, the outcomes from LASIK, PRK and SMILE are the same. Most people have normal vision after laser eye surgery and are very happy with their result.

Remember to be patient over the days and weeks following your procedure. Continue to use the eye drops and medications as directed to help your eyes recover as quickly as possible. Always check with your surgeon if you are unsure about when you can resume a particular activity after surgery.

Once you are enjoying life free from glasses or contact lenses, the initial recovery period will seem like a distant memory.

# YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

## Is laser eye surgery permanent?

LASIK, PRK and SMILE permanently reshape the cornea. Some people may require a follow-up procedure to enhance or improve the initial results.

It's important to be aware that presbyopia can develop at around 40–50 years of age. Presbyopia is an age-related condition of your lens, which reduces your ability to focus on near objects and will occur regardless of whether you have laser eye surgery or not. Presbyopia does not involve the cornea. Laser eye surgery will not prevent the development of presbyopia, although it is sometimes used to delay the need for glasses.

## What if I am pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to conceive?

Laser eye surgery is avoided in women who are pregnant. Many women experience fluctuating vision during pregnancy. This occurs when hormonal changes cause your body to retain fluid, which can cause the cornea to swell. Some women may be more short-sighted while they are pregnant. We recommend waiting until your vision returns to its previous state, generally within a few months after giving birth. Additionally, the medications used during and after surgery could affect your unborn baby.

If you are breastfeeding and wish to have laser eye surgery, you will need to discuss this directly with your surgeon. This will depend on various factors, including the age of your baby.

You should also wait at least three weeks after having laser eye surgery before trying to conceive. There is a small chance that the medications could be absorbed into your bloodstream.



## Does laser eye surgery hurt?

Laser eye surgery isn't painful. Most people report feeling mild pressure on their eye. However, all patients are given local anaesthetic drops and often a mild sedative.

## How long does the procedure take?

You will be in the clinic for around 2–3 hours, but the surgery itself only takes about 20 minutes for both eyes.

## How quickly does laser eye surgery work?

Many people are surprised that they can see distant objects, such as a clock on the wall, as they are leaving the laser suite. Most people can legally drive without the use of glasses or contact lenses one to two days after having LASIK or SMILE.

PRK ultimately provides the same visual outcome as LASIK and SMILE, although recovery time is longer. Your vision can fluctuate for up to six weeks before it settles.



## What happens if I blink?

You don't need to worry about blinking during laser eye surgery. During the procedure, a small device (also known as a 'speculum' or 'lid holder') will be fitted to your eye to hold your lids open and stop you from blinking.

The laser is highly sophisticated and fitted with an infrared eye tracker. This tracker constantly measures your eye movements during surgery. Even the smallest movement will be detected, which the laser will compensate for.

## How long do I have to wait before playing sport or swimming?

Good visual function is achieved within 24–48 hours with LASIK and SMILE but may take up to two weeks with PRK.

If surgery was routine and successful, contact sports (including martial art sparring) can be resumed within five days after SMILE, 2–4 weeks after PRK and one month after LASIK.

Swimming may be resumed five days after SMILE, one week after PRK and two weeks after LASIK.

## What are the side-effects of laser eye surgery?

Laser eye surgery is a routine procedure. However, like any surgical procedure, there are always potential benefits and risks.

Minor side-effects are seen in around 1–2% of patients. For example, a less-than-expected visual result that requires an enhancement or temporary dry eyes that require drops.

Very rarely, some patients can get infections or suffer complications that are more serious. The chance of having a serious vision-threatening complication is extremely small (very much less than 1%). No patient in Australia has ever become blind from laser eye surgery.

Selecting the correct procedure for your eyes (which sometimes means not having surgery at all) minimises the risk of a serious complication. The experience of your surgeon and the clinic staff are also very important considerations.

Vision Eye Institute surgeons and clinics adhere to strict sterility and surgical processes and have access to the latest state-of-the-art equipment and technology. Patients are discharged with the appropriate post-operative medication, which may include antibiotic drops and pain-relief medication.

Always have a comprehensive discussion about the benefits and risks of surgery with your ophthalmologist before proceeding.

## Will Medicare or my private health fund cover any of the cost?

Please note that Medicare does not rebate any of the cost of laser eye surgery (apart from the cost of the pre-surgical consultation). Some private health insurers provide cover for laser eye surgery in some of their products. Medibank members with selected extras and packaged covers can receive 15% off surgical fees at Vision Eye Institute (excludes consultation fees). A fund check may be performed to assess your eligibility. Check with your health insurer if your level of cover includes rebates for laser eye surgery.

## What if I'm not suitable for laser eye surgery?

There are several reasons why laser eye surgery may not be suitable for some people. Depending on the reason, other vision correction options may be suitable. Examples include replacement lens exchange or implantable lenses. Once you have had your eyes tested and examined, your ophthalmologist will be able to discuss alternative treatment options with you.

# CONTACT US

If you would like to know more about whether laser eye surgery could be right for you, contact one of our laser clinics to:

## 1. Book a free, no-obligation assessment with an optometrist or orthoptist

To check the health of your cornea and determine if you are within the treatable range. You may then choose to follow up with a full consultation.

Virtual laser assessments are also available. Call **1800 1 LASER** to learn more.

## 2. Book a consultation with a surgeon or clinical optometrist\*

To undergo comprehensive eye testing and examination to confirm your eligibility for laser eye surgery and which procedure is recommended for you.

There is **no obligation** to proceed with surgery.

\*Surgical consultations attract a fee – a Medicare rebate is available with a referral letter from a GP or optometrist. Please note that surgery cannot proceed without a surgical consultation first.

## NEW SOUTH WALES



### BONDI JUNCTION

T: 02 9386 3666



### CHATSWOOD

T: 02 9424 9999



### HURSTVILLE

T: 02 9330 6900

## QUEENSLAND



### BRISBANE (Dr Lenton)

T: 07 3736 3015



### TOWNSVILLE

T: 07 4728 9634

## VICTORIA



### MELBOURNE (ST KILDA RD)

T: 03 9521 2175



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