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LASEK: A New Option for Laser Vision Correction That Wont Leave You Hazy

New York, NY November 2002— Laser epithelial keratomileusis (LASEK) is a newer form of laser vision correction that combines many of the benefits of the two most commonly performed procedures - *LASIK* (laser assisted in-situ keratomileusis) and *PRK* (photorefractive keratectomy). “In the right patients, it can deliver excellent visual results,” says **New Jersey ophthalmologist Dr. Cary Silverman of EyeCare 20/20**. LASEK is a safe and effective surgical technique for patients with thin corneas and patients with professions or lifestyles that predispose them to flap trauma. For example, athletes involved in contact sports or military personnel are considered good candidates for LASEK.

As Dr. Silverman explains, “All laser vision correction works by reshaping the cornea (the clear front part of the eye), so that light traveling through it is properly focused onto the retina (back of the eye). The cornea has five distinct layers. In **LASEK**, the top layer of cells, or epithelium, is treated with alcohol for about 30 seconds to detach it from the underlying tissue, then it is lifted or rolled back. The newly exposed tissue is treated with the same laser used in *LASIK* or *PRK*, then the top layer of cells is replaced.” LASEK differs from *PRK* by preserving the top layer of cells, rather than scraping them away and waiting for them to grow back. This is supposed to facilitate healing of the cornea with less discomfort than *PRK*. LASEK also avoids some of the problems that can be associated with *LASIK*, which uses a cutting device known as a microkeratome to slice to a deeper layer of the cornea before doing the laser treatment. After removing the solution from the eye, the surgeon will lift the edge of the epithelial flap and gently fold it back out of the way. After the epithelium flap is moved out of the way, excimer laser energy is applied through the Bowman's Layer and into the stroma to reshape the cornea. When the cornea has been reshaped by the laser, the epithelium flap is returned back to its original position. A contact lens is placed on the cornea as a bandage for several days to aid in the healing and the reduction of pain.

Dr. Silverman explains that. ”It normally takes three to ten days for the epithelium to heal and resurface the cornea. This healing time varies depending on a number of factors such as the size of the area treated, the health of the patient's cornea, the individual's healing rate, and the toxicity of the medications and solutions applied to the surface of the cornea.”

One of the advantages of LASEK is that it appeals to some patients who do not like the idea of having their eye cut. It may also be better for patients who have steep, flat, or very thin corneas, which make it difficult for the surgeon to make a proper *LASIK* flap.” Since traumatic injury to the eye is more serious after *LASIK* than LASEK, patients who engage in professional or leisure activities that put their eyes at increased risk for injury (such as boxing) may be better suited for LASEK. LASEK also causes dry eye less frequently than *LASIK* does, so it appeals to patients who suffer from that condition.

Visual recovery after LASEK is generally faster than in PRK, but slower than LASIK. LASEK appears to be a superior option for patients with dry eyes. Safety is the biggest advantage of LASEK over PRK or LASIK. **The advantages of LASEK over PRK are:**

- reduction of postoperative discomfort
- decreased risk of infection,
- decreased incidence of corneal haze.

Advantages of LASEK over LASIK include elimination or reduction of all risks associated with malfunctioning of the microkeratome. LASEK eliminates the manipulation of approximately 160 microns more corneal tissue, on average, than a typical LASIK procedure. The use of the excimer laser for LASEK is not FDA-approved, but is an "off label use" use of the excimer laser. LASIK was also an off label use of the excimer laser for many years and with some lasers continues to be an off label use.

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