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Are You a Candidate?



## Imperfect Vision When Lasik Surgery Can Go Wrong

abc NEWS.com

**June 28** — Every week, thousands of people choose to have Lasik eye surgery, a quick procedure that proponents say allows patients to throw away their glasses. But for some, the surgery carries great danger.

Tens of thousands of patients have suffered serious vision problems after having Lasik surgery. (ABCNEWS.com)



### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

['A Tidal Wave of Misery'](#) [Not For Everyone](#)



In a hidden-camera investigation, ABCNEWS' *PrimeTime* discovers that some doctors are willing to perform Lasik surgery even on high-risk patients, who can suffer serious damage to their vision as a result.

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Approved by the federal government just six years ago, Lasik has grown from a medical miracle into a \$2-billion industry. As many as 2 million Americans are expected to undergo the procedure this year alone, making it the most popular elective surgery in America today. "When performed well on the right person, it's a great surgery and people are very very thrilled with it," says Dr. Joseph Dello Russo, one of the best-known Lasik surgeons in New York City.

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But these days, Dello Russo spends more and more of his time repairing work done by other doctors.

HELP & TOOLS

"It's a new specialty, unfortunately," he says. "And the number of people who are being harmed is just going to accumulate every year."

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### 'A Tidal Wave of Misery'



According to industry estimates, tens of thousands of people may have suffered serious complications after Lasik — often not because of how the surgery was done, but because of who is getting it.



Not everyone with vision problems should have Lasik. And if you're a bad candidate and still have the procedure, the results can be devastating.

Jeffrey Hochman, a New York stock trader, found this out after treating himself to Lasik as a gift for doing well in the market.

"They told me I was an excellent candidate," says Hochman, who more than a year after the surgery has serious vision problems.

Several months after the surgery, Hochman went to Dello Russo, who told him he should never have had the procedure because his large pupils could cause him to end up with double vision or a glare.

"I've heard that story hundreds of times," says Ron Link, who was a fireman until his eyes were damaged by Lasik surgery. "It's just been a tidal wave of misery — jobs lost, marriages broken, people on antidepressants, attempted suicides... all over an elective procedure, something medically unnecessary."

### Not For Everyone

The Lasik procedure is not recommended for anyone who:

- Is under 18
- Is pregnant
- Has a history of eye disease, from optic nerve damage, to cataracts or to problems with the cornea or corneal thinning
- Extremely large pupils
- Very thin corneas
- Very strong prescriptions

Detecting these problems, according to Dr. Barrie Soloway, a Lasik surgeon in New York, is not very difficult. "It just takes time," he says. "There's a lot of measurements to

be done. But they should be done."

As part of its investigation, *PrimeTime* sent a young woman with very thin corneas and very large pupils to a number of clinics to see if doctors would warn her of the risks or be willing to operate. Most of the clinics told her she should not have the surgery.

But *PrimeTime's* camera captured one doctor telling her she was a good candidate. The doctor was minutes away from performing the surgery when she left his office.

Other patients say they have had the procedure done — without warnings that they were not good candidates — only to find out they were bad candidates, and have suffered impaired vision ever since.

"This is not the no-brainer that everybody seems to portray it as," says Hochman, who struggles with a glare, blurry vision and multiple images every day. "There are risks and there are trade-offs ... And the downside is tremendous."

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Before electing to undergo Lasik surgery, you should seek the advice of several doctors; getting a second and third opinion can be crucial in helping you make the right decision. Ask each of them:

- How many procedures have they done?
- Is it their specialty?
- Will the doctor or surgeon see you again before your surgery?
- Who is screening you to determine if you are a good or bad candidate? A technician, optometrist or, ideally, an ophthalmologist? (Remember, just because they may be charging top dollar for the procedure does not necessarily mean they are adequately screening potential candidates.)
- What are the measurements for your pupils? If they are larger than 7 mm, there could be a problem with lasik. Even some of the new special programs for the lasers are not necessarily treating the entire pupil, but may be using a blended zone which could make vision problems for you.
- Do your eyes have any special risks?
- How thick is your cornea? If it is too thin there could be a serious problem with lasik. The average cornea is about 520 microns.
- How many people does your doctor turn away? Top surgeons told us they may turn away up to 30 percent of the people who want lasik because they are bad candidates.

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