

Cataract Surgery after LASIK

If you had LASIK in the past and are now planning cataract surgery, it is important to understand how this prior eye surgery may affect your experience.

How LASIK works:

LASIK for nearsightedness works by flattening the anterior surface of the central cornea, making this portion of your cornea less nearsighted. LASIK probably freed you from wearing thick glasses or contact lenses for years, if not decades. Most people who have LASIK are usually very happy with this experience.

Side effects of LASIK:

LASIK has important potential side effects, including glare and dry eye.

Glare: Glare occurs because the *central* cornea is flattened by LASIK, but the *peripheral* cornea is not treated. This means that after LASIK the peripheral cornea remains nearsighted, even though the central cornea is not. When your pupil is dilated in dim light this outer, nearsighted part of the cornea will scatter light inside of the eye. This causes glare. Cataracts also cause glare, so cataract surgery will probably make glare better. However, the glare caused by LASIK will not be made better with cataract surgery. Because of this, at least some symptoms of glare may persist even after cataract surgery. It is hard to tell before cataract surgery how much glare is caused by the cataract and how much is caused by your LASIK.

Dry Eye: Dry eye occurs for two reasons. First, LASIK cuts the nerves that tell the eye to create tears. Second, the flattening of the anterior cornea causes the tear film to break up faster.

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One of the most important issues in surgical planning for cataract surgery is choosing the correct artificial lens to put into the eye to achieve your desired refractive outcome. The flattening of the cornea after LASIK makes this calculation more difficult. Therefore, if you have had LASIK, the refractive outcome after cataract surgery is harder to predict. You may need glasses to achieve your best vision. The cornea after LASIK is thinner and therefore may take longer to stabilize after cataract surgery. Because of this, your refraction may continue to change for the first several months.

In summary, if you have had LASIK, cataract surgery will most likely improve your vision. However, you may have some persistent symptoms of dry eye and glare. Also, your refractive outcome is less predictable and takes longer to stabilize.