

Debunking the myths surrounding Lasik

THE use of lasers in refractive eye surgery was introduced and approved in the late 90s. Laser vision correction or more commonly known as Lasik eye surgery have evolved over the past 20 years and has become more effective and safer. As the technology used in ophthalmology continues to advance, there are many options available for various refractive errors.

Depending on the condition, patients can opt for either traditional Lasik or more advanced bladeless options that are classified as minimally invasive surgical procedures. “Technological advancements in ophthalmology have made Lasik eye surgeries easier to perform while also allowing the safety margin to significantly increase,” explains Dr Norazah Abdul Rahman, a consultant ophthalmologist and paediatric ophthalmologist at Ara Damansara Medical Centre (ADMC).

“An example of the evolvement of Lasik would be iLasik, which is customised to the patient’s specific condition and a form of bladeless surgery. iLasik’s laser accuracy and precision allow for a faultless procedure that also treats aberrations such as poor contrast sensitivity, glare, and poor night vision. iLasik uses advanced technology to measure and map out the unique imperfections and the eye’s entire optical pathway,” elaborates Dr Norazah.

The development of iLasik (also known as custom Lasik or wavefront Lasik) is the most advanced and modern form of Lasik eye surgery. iLasik has become a staple option, one that is popular among aviator pilots and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronauts.

Traditional Lasik vs iLasik

In traditional Lasik, a microkeratome (surgical blade) is used to create the corneal flap to reshape the corneal stroma. Once the flap is made, the reshaping of the stroma can be made using an excimer laser. In a Bladeless Lasik procedure, a laser known as IntraLase is used to create the corneal flap.

Furthermore, apart from using the IntraLase Laser to create the



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flap, iLasik surgeries offer the main benefits of wavefront-guided Lasik surgery. This goes one step further in improving how much you can see and also improving the overall quality of your vision, which equates to a greater margin of vision improvement.

The technology involved in iLasik vision corrective surgery has been validated for its safety and precision. The aspect that makes iLasik distinct is the individualisation and personalised approach it offers, setting it out as a one-of-a-kind procedure that is individually customised for each patient.

Despite the advancement of the technology and the safety standards when it comes to the procedure, there are still many misconceptions surrounding the topic. It is perhaps the reason that many people opt to continue wearing prescription glasses or contact lenses despite finding them inconvenient or troublesome.

Dr Norazah adds, “Lasik surgery is a safe and popular procedure that has helped millions of people correct their vision without the need for eyewear. Understanding the facts about Lasik surgery as well as its benefits can help you make an informed decision.”

Here are some of the myths that

are still around.

Myth 1: Lasik eye surgery is painful

It is believed that Lasik eye surgery is a painful process because of the incision that is to be made on the corneal flap. However, Lasik eye surgery is actually a quick and painless procedure.

Anaesthetic eye numbing drops are administered before the procedure, which work to block the nerve endings in the eye from feeling any sort of pain. Patients may experience mild yet bearable discomfort once the anaesthetic numbing drops have worn off after surgery. The duration of the procedure may vary depending on the amount of correction needed and prescription, however, the average duration is less than 30 minutes.

“Patients may feel slight pressure very briefly as we create a flap that allows the laser to reach the cornea. However, the laser treatment is pain-free, and it’s quick. The actual laser time is about one minute for each eye. Lasik is performed as an outpatient procedure, and you will be able to return home after about two hours. In most cases, you will be able to return to your regular activities within a couple of days after your procedure,” says Dr Norazah.

Myth 2: Lasik eye surgery only corrects myopia

Many believe that Lasik surgery only corrects myopia as it was invented to treat the condition. Since then, the procedure has evolved and it is now performed to correct hyperopia and astigmatism. Dr Norazah explains, “When it comes to myopia, the laser will work on the centre of the cornea to flatten it whereas in hyperopia, the laser is focused on the sides of the cornea to enhance peripheral

vision. In astigmatism, we will have to examine the thickness of the cornea with relation to your diagnosed refractive error before proceeding with the surgery.

“In traditional Lasik eye surgery, patients who have thin corneas would be advised against the procedure. However, iLasik in particular is suitable for patients with thin corneas as the laser utilises the mapped out optical pathway to precisely create a thin enough corneal flap.”

Myth 3: A complication of Lasik eye surgery leads to permanent vision loss

Many fear the complications and risks that come with any sort of surgery, but it is important to know that Lasik eye surgery itself does not cause blindness. However, should appropriate aftercare is not heeded, infections can take place that may lead to permanent vision loss.

Lasik complications can be avoided with proper aftercare procedures set forth by your ophthalmologist.

“As with any other surgical procedure, there are possible complications and risks that accompany Lasik surgery, such as dry eyes or blurry vision for a couple of days. Being the leading form of Lasik eye surgery, the technological advancements in iLasik combines the precision and safety of Wavefront-guided Lasik technology and IntraLase technology; making it extremely safe and accurate at fixing refractive errors while eliminating complications,” assures Dr Norazah.

Myth 4: Lasik surgery is not affordable

Many tend to stay away from Lasik eye surgery because of its overbearing price but the up-front one-off cost of Lasik eye surgery can be less over time as compared



Dr Norazah Abdul Rahman.

to the continuous purchase of contact lenses, contact lens solutions and additional prescription glasses.

“As a result of advanced technology and an increase in the number of people undergoing Lasik surgery, the cost of the procedure has significantly decreased over the years. Don’t let the cost of the procedure prevent you from discussing it with your eye doctor. There are many vision package plans as well as financing options that can help you cover the cost of the procedure, without breaking the bank,” Dr Norazah reveals.

Myth 5: Age is not an underlying factor of being eligible for Lasik eye surgery

Many people assume that Lasik eye surgery is suitable for anyone despite age but there are loads of factors surrounding age that makes a patient eligible for the surgery. The recommended age for Lasik is 18 years and above.

Most eye doctors will recommend patients to be at least 18 years of age before undergoing surgery as the eyes would have stopped growing. However, most patients are encouraged to wait a few more years until their mid-20s once their prescription has stabilised.

There is no upper age limit preventing seniors from having Lasik eye surgery, but many factors are taken into consideration before a senior patient can be approved as a candidate. Dr Norazah explains, “Your eye doctor may explain to you that as you age, your risk for developing serious eye conditions, including age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and cataracts, increases. These eye conditions can prevent you from being a candidate for Lasik surgery.”

Patients are encouraged to conduct thorough research when considering Lasik eye surgery. Price should not be the sole factor when it comes to considering refractive surgery. Instead, it is of greater importance to ensure both the ophthalmologist and the facility place emphasis on advanced technologies and comprehensive care as they perform the procedure.

■ For more information, call 03-7839 9303/9304 (during office hours) or 03-5639 1212 (after office hours).



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Dealing with childhood myopia

MYOPIA is estimated to affect 1.5 billion people and the numbers continue to increase. Being in the epicentre of myopia or short-sightedness in the world, 33% of Malaysians have been found to have this condition, more commonly among the Chinese and Malay communities, with a 42% and 15% prevalence rate respectively, according to local studies.

The importance of screening, detecting and restoring vision among Malaysian children, particularly on correctable conditions such as refractive error (myopia or short sightedness) cannot be emphasised enough.

Dr Azlindarita @ Aisyah Mohd Abdullah, consultant general and paediatric ophthalmologist at MSU Medical Centre, says, “Studies have shown that there is an increase in cases of myopia. For example, a study in Selangor in 2005 concluded that, only one in 10 seven-year-old Chinese children had myopia, but the number will rise to one in three children by the time they reached their teenage years. Another study showed that children in urban areas have a three times higher rate of myopia, as compared to children living in suburban areas.

“It will be interesting to see the prevalence of myopia in children after nearly two years of online learning, as numerous studies from around the globe have been suggesting that near work is associated with higher risk of the onset and progression of myopia.”

Signs and symptoms of refractive error in children

The most common type of refractive error in children in Malaysia is myopia. Objects in the distance appear blurry and only become clearer once the objects are

nearer to the eye.

Children less than two years old may appear to have cross eyes, tend to bring objects very close to their eyes or get closer to the object such as when they watch television. Frequent knocking into objects such as toys on the floor can also occur in children with very high refractive error. Occasionally, children may adopt an abnormal head posture (AHP) such as face turn, head tilt or chin lift, particularly among those with astigmatism, as the change in position somewhat improves their vision.

In older children, they might squint or decrease their eye aperture when looking at a distant object. AHP can still occur in this group of children.

School children may complain of headache, eye strain or the inability to see clearly in the classroom.

Contributing factors to the increase in refractive errors

The high prevalence of myopia among Asians is contributed to genetic factors, but the steep increase is also due to environmental factors such as an increase in near work among children (including excessive use of gadgets), reduced sun exposure, increased time indoors and late intervention for refractive error correction.

Myths sometimes delay the treatment for refractive errors for children. For example, some parents are hesitant to provide prescription glasses to their children in fear that it will further deteriorate the child’s vision.

This is not true as children, particularly young ones, need clear visual stimulation to enable them to develop their full potential and prevent them from getting lazy eyes or amblyopia.



Dr Azlindarita says, ‘Studies have shown that there is an increase in myopia.’

The mushroom effects of over-the-counter eyedrops and products bought online claiming to cure refractive errors are also harmful to children.

Treatment options for children

All refractive errors that cause significant blurring of vision will need to be corrected with prescription glasses or contact lenses. Prescription glasses are the simpler option as it carries less risk of infection compared to contact lenses. However, in certain conditions such as those requiring a very high-powered prescription, contact lenses may be prescribed as eyeglasses may be uncomfortable for the user and thus reduce the compliance.

Atropine eyedrops in low concentration have been used to slow down the progression of myopia. However, this medication can only be prescribed by

ophthalmologists who monitor the child’s progress.

A special contact lens that is worn at night, called the orthokeratology lens, has shown some promising results in slowing down the progression of myopia in children. However, it has a slightly higher risk of infection as it is worn overnight, and the hygiene of the lenses will have to be taken care by the parents.

Myopia usually progresses yearly and stabilises in the late teens to early twenties. Laser surgery may be an alternative treatment to correct the condition for those above the age of 21.

Acting as a nation

At the national level, a large population-based study should be done to assess the current prevalence of uncorrected refractive error amongst Malaysian children.

From this study, targeted groups can be assisted to obtain required treatment, and thus preventing them from becoming adults with permanent visual impairment, either from amblyopia or from complications of high myopia such as cataract, glaucoma and retinal detachment. We should increase in the number of eyecare personnel trained in refraction and vision correction to aid ophthalmologists.

Massive screening programmes should also be initiated by the government by using photo screening, incorporating Artificial Intelligence to detect refractive errors early in children.

The Malaysia Advocacy for Myopia Prevention, under the purview of the Malaysian Society of Ophthalmology aims to raise awareness of myopia through education and collaborative efforts with eye care professionals, parents, educators and policy makers.

CONTACT lenses have become more popular as compared to before due to its easy application. Be it prescribed or as a fashion accessory, contact lenses are sought after by many teens and adults.

However, the time and effort that need to go into taking care of a pair of contact lenses are not often met. Contrary to popular belief, contact lenses are extremely delicate and need to be cared for properly. Here are a few ways to tend to your contact lenses:

1. Lens solution

The lens solution is extremely vital to having well-maintained lenses. One common mistake contact lens users often make is being stingy with the solution and trying to reuse the solution to get the most out of a bottle. Lens solutions are generally disinfectants, but reusing the same solution allows bacteria to proliferate and the solution stops being sterile.

Always use fresh solution to clean, rinse and store the lenses. It is also important to always refill the solution case or bottle with a new solution instead of adding more solution on top of the residue solution. This is to avoid any build-up of germs or bacteria to stick to your lenses, which will then get in contact with your eyes.

2. Stick to the recommended usage period

Always follow the specified wearing schedule as strictly as possible. If your eye care professional or optician has prescribed a period of one month for your lenses, stick to that timeline and do not exceed it. Prolonged usage of contact lenses beyond their recommended timeline can dry out your eyes and cause discomfort, or even worse, infection.

3. Using different alternatives

As frugal as you may want to be, avoid switching out products to cheaper alternatives that can potentially compromise your eye health. For example, using soapy water or even saliva to lubricate, wet or

Caring for your contact lenses



Users must step up and take responsibility to ensure their lenses are well cared for to avoid jeopardising their health and well-being.

clean your lenses can expose them to germs and bacteria. This can lead to eye infection and vision loss in more serious cases. This also applies to the brand of the lens solution. Always use the one recommended to you by a professional instead of going for cheaper options.

4. Self-hygiene

Before going anywhere near your lenses, it is important to ensure your hands are clean and dry. Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly with a lint-free towel before touching your lenses to avoid an accidental transfer of germs and bacteria through touch.

5. Sleeping

After a long day, it is natural to want to just climb into bed and drift into sleep. But sleeping with your contact lenses can increase your chances of getting a serious eye infection by six to eight times.

Contact lenses are designed to fit right over the surface of the eyes, which significantly reduce the amount of oxygen and moisture accessible to your eyes. When you are awake, blinking keeps your eyes moist and allows oxygen to flow through with ease.

However, without sufficient oxygen passing through when you fall asleep, you can get hypoxia, a condition where the cells

in your eyes loses the ability to fight bacteria and germs effectively.

While wearing contact lenses may be a fun or convenient option in daily life, there is a meticulous process involved in caring for them that requires patience and diligence.

Contact lenses need to be properly taken care of to ensure beneficial usage. Users must step up and take responsibility to ensure their lenses are well cared for to avoid jeopardising their health and well-being.

It is also best to consult trained professionals and seek their advice on managing eye health.



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USUALLY, people take up healthy diets to slim down. It's not often that you hear of foods consumed specifically for the eyes. Carrots, spinach, broccoli – aren't these just myths to make kids eat more vegetables?

The widely believed myth that carrots give you better eyesight just happens to be a proven fact, albeit an exaggerated one. Carrots contain high amounts of beta-carotene and vitamin A. These two substances aid in strengthening vision and protecting against cataracts. However, this doesn't mean that simply eating carrots would give an individual perfect eyesight.

There are many other foods that serve as sources of eye-strengthening nutrients. Here are some eye-healthy recipes that can be easily recreated at home:

Spinach and cheese omelette

Dark leafy greens like spinach are great for your overall health, but even better for your eye health. They contain two antioxidants that help maintain and improve vision – lutein and zeaxanthin. These antioxidants absorb excess light energy that is damaging to the retina.

Cheese and eggs, specifically egg yolks, are an alternative source of vitamin A. Vitamin A provides strong protection against degeneration of the retina and the formation of cataracts. It also contains a pigment that enables night vision.

- Ingredients:**
- 1 tablespoon (tbsp) of butter or olive oil
 - A pinch of salt and pepper
 - 2 large eggs
 - 1/2 cup of spinach
 - 2 cheese slices

Method:

Whisk together eggs, salt and pepper until light and frothy. Melt the butter in a non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Add the spinach and cook for a minute until soft and heated through.

Spread the spinach evenly in the pan, then add the eggs. Gently tilt the pan to cover the

Eyeing a healthy diet



Other than leafy greens, oranges and berries are packed with Vitamin C which helps protect against cataracts and structural degeneration.

spinach entirely with the eggs.

Cook for about 30 seconds until the edges of the omelette are firm. Add the cheese slices on top. Reduce the heat to low and cook for one to two minutes until the eggs are set.

Using a spatula, gently fold the omelette in half and cook a little longer for the cheese to melt well. Serve immediately. Serves one.

Sautéed broccoli side dish

Like spinach, broccoli is a great source of

the antioxidant lutein. Lutein helps to protect the eyes from blue light, which is damaging to the retinas and lenses of the eyes. Broccoli also contains beta-carotene (which the body converts into vitamin A) and vitamin C. Vitamin A is essential for night vision, while vitamin C protects the eyes from sustaining light-induced damage.

- Ingredients:**
- 1 floret of broccoli
 - 1 tbsp of olive oil
 - A pinch of salt and pepper

- 1/2 lemon for dressing
- Method:**
- Wash and dry the broccoli thoroughly. Cut the floret into smaller florets, trimming off the harder parts of the stems. Coat a frying pan with oil and set the heat at medium high.
- Add the florets along with a pinch of salt and pepper. Toss the florets in the pan to coat them with oil. Stir constantly until the broccoli is tender and a bright green colour. Transfer to a bowl and squeeze half a lemon over the florets. Mix well to distribute the lemon juice. Serve as a side dish.

C-salad

Oranges and berries pack a powerful punch when it comes to vitamin C. Vitamin C helps to protect against cataracts and structural degeneration. So, why not try putting together a delicious and refreshing fruit salad to satisfy your cravings and your eyes at the same time?

- Ingredients:**
- 1 mandarin orange
 - 1 box of blueberries
 - 1/2 box of strawberries
 - 1 teaspoon (tsp) of honey
 - 1 tbsp of lemon juice
 - 1 tbsp of lime juice

Method:

Peel the mandarin orange and separate it into segments. Wash the blueberries and strawberries. Remove the stems from the strawberries before slicing them in half. Place all the fruits in a bowl. In a separate bowl, mix the honey, lemon juice and lime juice well. Pour over the fruits, then gently mix to coat them sufficiently. Enjoy chilled. Serves one.



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