

Does LASIK save money?

Stephen Updegraff, MD, Brian Davis, MD, Jayne Weiss, MD and other LASIK surgeons imply that it's cheaper in the long run to have LASIK than to continue to wear glasses or contacts.¹⁻³

What Dr. Updegraff, Dr. Davis, Dr. Weiss and their colleagues may not tell you is that LASIK can result in such devastating complications that patients may spend many times the cost of their LASIK surgery in just the first few months or years after surgery, and that LASIK complications can add up to be the most costly medical expenses of a patient's lifetime.

Fluctuating vision after LASIK may lead to need for new glasses or contacts every few months, which may never stabilize. Imagine the cost of several new pair of prescription glasses, prescription sunglasses and contact lenses each year for life.

Vision problems after LASIK, such as double vision, night-time starbursts and halos may not be correctable with glasses or soft contacts and, instead, may require expensive specialty hard contact lenses. A post-LASIK contact lens fitting exam may cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars and the special lenses themselves may run several hundred to over a thousand dollars.

The ongoing cost of contact lens supplies may not diminish after LASIK if your surgery doesn't live up to the hype. Even though LASIK surgeons would like for you to think that you'll be saving money on contact lens supplies after LASIK, that may not be true -- in fact, you may be spending more!

Annual eye exams may be more important after LASIK than before LASIK. So, don't be misled into thinking you won't really need to see the eye doctor after LASIK. Patients who suffer from LASIK-induced dry eyes, LASIK-induced visual problems or other complications after LASIK require more frequent trips to eye care specialists than before LASIK.

The need for reading glasses for LASIK patients after age 40 is a certainty. A LASIK surgeon who says that you'll need reading glasses after age 40 whether you have LASIK or not is being dishonest. A near-sighted patient over 40 who has not had LASIK can simply remove his or her glasses to read and see up close. LASIK patients over 40 whose vision regresses or falls short of what they expected may require bifocals, just like the rest of the population.

Treating LASIK-induced dry eye can be very costly. Common therapies to treat dry eye after LASIK include extensive use of artificial tears, ointment or gel for night-time lubrication, use of moisture retaining goggles, commercial eyelid scrubs, prescription eye drops (Restasis), omega-3 supplementation, and plugging or cauterization of the tear ducts.

Here's a five-year estimate of the cost incurred by a LASIK patient who suffers from dry eyes, visual fluctuation, and night vision problems:

Semi-annual eye exams (\$105)	\$ 1,050
Annual contact lens fitting (\$1,000)	\$ 5,000
Post-surgical contact lenses every six months (\$330)	\$ 3,330
Glasses - 4 pair per year (\$250)	\$ 5,000
Contact lens supplies (\$35/mo.)	\$ 2,400
Dry eye OTC treatment (\$60/mo.)	\$ 3,600
Moisture retaining goggles	\$ 200
Fish oil supplementation (\$22/mo.)	\$ 1,320
Total 5-year cost of bad LASIK:	\$21,900*

*(Estimate does not include cost of punctal plugs, punctal cautery, and Restasis).

If you think glasses and contacts are expensive, ask yourself if you can afford the expense of a bad LASIK outcome. Imagine living with regret of a decision that turns your life upside down. Don't let games LASIK surgeons play fool you into undergoing an unnecessary, risky surgery on your only pair of eyes! Play it safe - keep your glasses!

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1. Dr. Stephen Updegraff LASIK commercial 9/22/2009 on Tampa, Florida television station implying that LASIK is cheaper than glasses or contacts and makes good financial sense in a down economy.

2. <http://www.davisvisionmd.com/blog/lasik-costs/lasik-vs-glasses-contacts/?display=picture> Assessed 9/22/2009

3. <http://www.lasik-detroit.com/> Assessed 9/22/2009