

New surgery is a vision

There's an interesting article about Lasik eye surgery in the latest issue of "American Way," the in-flight magazine for American Airlines. Not only does it go into the entire Lasik procedure, but it offers another option that promises to outperform Lasik and anything else we have available today.

Basically, for those unfamiliar with Lasik, it's available to a vast number of people with nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism (blurry vision from a misshaped cornea). It involves creating a flap and re-

shaping the cornea of the eye using a laser. However, healing time for the procedure varies and older adults tend to experience a longer and more painful recuperation. I can attest to the latter because I was one of these unfortunate people who happened to have skinny corneas, sadly the only thin place on my body.



**As I
see it**

Peg Demarco

Before I get into the remarkable new procedure that is predicted to join and/or replace Lasik someday, let me first tell you that I had been wearing

eyeglasses since I was five years old. As I grew, so did the thickness of the lens. In high school, my eyeglasses were referred to as Coke bottles because they were as thick as the bottom of a Coke bottle.

Vanity outweighed my desire to see during my teen years and squinting became a way of life. I probably could have been an A student — if I had only seen the blackboard for four years.

Dating was ... well, interesting, to say the least. There were numerous trips down a flight of stairs, dancing with a stranger because I hooked up with the wrong partner to the dismay of his date (who knew that two fellows decided to wear a red shirt at the dancehall?), getting into the wrong Volkswagen.

At 19, I saved up my hard earned money (\$3,280 per year) and got my first pair of contact lenses. When the eye doctor asked if I could see the "E" on the eye chart, I sheepishly replied, "Umm...doctor, I'm sorry, but I can't even see the wall." That's how bad my eyes had become.

Lasik surgery was my gift to myself four years ago, and I don't regret it for a moment. Waking up that first morning and opening my eyes and seeing the world around me without having to grope for a pair of glasses was a wonderful moment and all the discomfort I would go through for one week per eye was certainly worth the surgery.

Today, however, there's something called Wavefront Lasik that probably wasn't available when my surgery was done. A patient's eyes are measured by a laser at 200 different points, allowing the ophthalmologist the ability to craft the cornea more exactly. According to the article, "It's literally space-age technology," and it takes advantage of the same optics used to program the Hubble telescope.

Aside from Lasik and Wavefront Lasik is another option on the horizon — implanting contact lenses inside the eye. Approved by the FDA in September 2004, it involves the ophthalmologist making a small incision at the boundary between the iris (colored portion) and the white portion of the eye, the sclera. The ophthalmologist then slips a lens in front of the iris and behind the cornea. Tiny clips hold the lens in place, and the entire surgery takes about 25 minutes.

Sounds easy, but painful perhaps, no? No. The good part about this procedure is that it's not painful at all. Lenses are made to the correct size and power before they go in and the patient is free from recuperation discomfort. The lenses are permanent, never needing removal or cleaning. Candidates should, of course, be old enough where their eyes are pretty settled and not changing at every checkup.

Refinements for this procedure are also on the horizon such as foldable versions of implantable lenses, which would allow for smaller incisions, making the surgery even less invasive and more appealing.

Best of all, scientists are also working on a lens implant made of photosensitive silicon; once it's in the eye, ophthalmologists could change its power to keep up with a patient's changing vision just by shining a light onto the lens. The article concludes that once that's available, there's not much reason to do Lasik anymore.

Try to imagine what it will be like decades from now. Children's eyes will be examined and these new lenses will be simply implanted in their eyes. Each year that they go for their checkups, their vision would be upgraded by a simple shining light. No more glasses to lose or break. No more sports enthusiasts forced to get contacts to play demanding sports or sit out on the sidelines. How about swimmers being able to swim underwater and see the coral and colorful fish? And, for a change, waking up to a beautiful sunrise and seeing the world as it really is.

This is the exciting wave of the future as far as our eyes are concerned. And if you doubt that, think about all those episodes of Star Trek and all those movies on the Sci-Fi channel that take place in the future many, many years from now — I've yet to see anyone wearing a pair of eyeglasses.

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