

LASIK AND DRY EYE

After LASIK refractive surgery, you may experience some dry eye discomfort for several weeks. This is entirely normal.

Dryness can occur after LASIK because some corneal nerve endings are damaged by the surgery. This makes your corneas less sensitive for a period of time and reduces feedback to the tear glands, causing them to produce fewer tears. As the corneal nerves heal, tear volume returns to normal and the dry eye condition resolves. However, the symptoms of dryness can last three to six months, or even longer in some instances.

It's important for all LASIK patients to use artificial tears at least four times daily for a minimum of two months after surgery. You may also need to use a moisturizing eye ointment at bedtime for a few weeks.

In some cases, artificial tears and moisturizing ointments are insufficient to relieve the symptoms of dry eye and a treatment called punctal occlusion is required. In this procedure, tiny sterile plugs are placed in the tear drainage ducts of your lower eyelids to keep more of your natural tears on your eyes. Depending on the degree of dryness you have, Dr. Carlson may insert either temporary plugs (which dissolve in 2 to 3 weeks) or permanent silicone plugs (which can be removed later if necessary).

The cost of punctal occlusion using temporary plugs is included in your LASIK surgery fee. If you require permanent silicone plugs, you will be billed a procedure fee \$430.50 for plugs in both lower lids. (Most health insurance companies will cover this fee when submitted with a diagnosis of "dry eye.")