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LASIK's Late Bloomers: Life (Without Glasses) Begins at 40
Refractive surgery clearly a hit among older patients

A River Forest ophthalmologist who has performed 8,000 LASIK surgeries over the past decade is witnessing a rising prevalence of patients past their 40th birthday who are undergoing the procedure.

There are first-movers with any new development, whether it's a new computer gadget, a fashion trend, or embracing a medical advance. And with LASIK, the trend toward older patients makes sense: many patients now in their 40s have been pondering the possibility for over 10 years, said Dr. Kent Kirk of Kirk Eye Center.

In that time, these recent converts have seen co-workers, friends and family members enjoying the benefits of LASIK for years. With the passage of time, too, there has come an increasing body of evidence of the procedure's safety and effectiveness.

"It's exciting and rewarding to see so many people getting off the fence and making this decision," said Dr. Kirk, who underwent LASIK more than a decade ago.

Every LASIK recipient has their last-straw story—the moment when they reached their limit in contending with eyeglasses and contact lenses.

For Sue Peters, a 41-year-old Oak Park mother of three, the moment came this past summer.

As in past summers, she and her family enjoyed the beach frequently. Though it was not so pleasurable when blowing sand irritated Peters' contacts, or she had to sport eyeglasses under her sunglasses, or she squeezed her eyes shut under water for fear of losing one or both of her contact lenses.

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So, after 25 years with glasses and contacts, Peters had LASIK surgery in late September. She credited Dr. Kirk's calming guidance with making the experience much less stressful than she anticipated.

When people learn about LASIK, particularly under Dr. Kirk's care, their safety fears fade. Not only has he performed 8,000 LASIK procedures, but his expertise has reached a point that he has trained other ophthalmologists to perform the surgery as well.

Dr. Kirk also gives free evaluations to determine if someone is a candidate for LASIK, and Kirk Eye Center provides interest-free monthly payment options for those who undergo the procedure.

There are two steps in the LASIK procedure. First, the surgeon creates a micro-thin corneal flap, which is then lifted to expose the inner cornea for the second step, vision treatment by an excimer laser.

Libby Clark of Oak Park at first wondered if, at 40, she might be too old for LASIK. After dreaming of having the procedure for five years, Clark underwent the surgery in late August.

That night, the professional researcher was reading and watching television. The next morning, she drove her car to her follow-up appointment and, after returning home, spent the rest of the day on her computer.

A mother of three, Clark has worn eyeglasses since the 8th grade, though contact lenses became her preference at a young age. She wore lenses so much that her eyelid became inflamed, making it difficult for her to continue wearing them.

Clark is avid about exercising, and is now thrilled to be able to get up early in the morning, pack her gym clothes and head to the health club. "I still feel like it's a dream state," said Clark.

Dr. Kirk has enjoyed hearing the before-and-after testimonials for years. Only now, the 'before' covers a longer span of time.

Dr. Kirk is committed to providing the highest level of care, which includes his own active involvement with a patient from start to finish. For example, with all patients Dr. Kirk follows up personally the day after the procedure to ensure they are progressing well.

“We are willing to do LASIK only if we have the newest and best equipment,” said Dr. Kirk. “We apply the safest technique available, and provide extensive pre- and post-surgery treatment. It’s not just about the procedure itself, but it’s the next day, and the next week, and on and on into the future.”

More detail about the LASIK procedure is at www.kirkeye.com.

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