



Keep Your Eye on the Ball

LASIK eye surgery can give golfers near-perfect vision without contacts or glasses. Today, there are more options than ever. **By Mary Christ**

for Laura Davies, the turning point was a 1999 tournament in Sweden. "It took me about ten minutes to hit a chip shot because grit kept blowing into my eyes," recalls the LPGA pro, 41. "I took my contacts out right there." Davies decided to get LASIK (laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis), a procedure in which a laser is used to reshape the cornea and correct vision, so she could ditch her contacts and glasses. Four days later she won the 2000 Los Angeles Women's Championship. "I could see where the ball was landing for the first time in years."

Eye-opening success stories like these have golfers, pro and amateur alike, flocking to eye surgeons. Davies is one of at least 50 LPGA players, including Se Ri Pak and Juli Inkster, who have had LASIK. In the past year, some 670,000 Americans have had laser eye surgery, more than half of them women.

According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), LASIK is safest and most effective for myopia, or nearsightedness, in patients older than 21 whose vision hasn't changed in a year. As for farsightedness, "LASIK is most effective for low-to-moderate hyperopia," says ophthalmologist Gary Varley, M.D., of the Cincinnati Eye Institute, who co-authored a recent AAO research paper on the subject. "But patients over 40 years old will still need reading glasses." And the improvement may not be permanent. "Having the surgery doesn't mean your eyes stop changing," says Elise Brisco, O.D., a Los Angeles optometrist who treats LASIK patients who suffer complications. While rare, they include dry eyes, loss of contrast and fluctuating vision.

New technologies can improve your results and reduce complications. With PRK (photorefractive keratectomy), the surgeon reshapes the cornea using a computer-controlled laser to remove micro-thin layers of tissue rather than cutting a flap. Typically, the

surgeon uses an oscillating scalpel called a microkeratome to slice the cornea, exposing the retina. More surgeons are using IntraLase, a computer-guided laser, said to provide more precise results, to make the incision (Varley says there isn't enough data yet to know how laser and scalpel compare). Another new laser technology, wavefront guided surgery, can detect subtle irregularities in the eye and then direct the laser to correct them, a variation some doctors call "custom LASIK."

"It's a great procedure for golfers because they can see the break in the green better," says Mark Whitten, M.D., a Maryland-based eye surgeon who corrected Tiger Woods' severe nearsightedness in 1999. "He said the cup seemed bigger," Whitten recalls. "The most common thing I hear from patients is that two weeks later they had their best round ever." □

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