



# RECOVERING FROM VISION SURGERY

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Whether you are considering LASIK or PRK surgery to correct your vision, or you're thinking about lens implants to rid yourself of cataracts, you probably have a few questions about the recovery process. Among other things, to prepare for any of these surgeries, you will need to know:

- If you need to arrange for someone to drive you home after the procedure
- If you will need to arrange for time off work to recover
- How much, if any, pain is to be expected and what is unusual or cause for concern
- When you can go back to your normal daily activities

In this ebook, we will walk you through the process of recovering and healing after vision surgery, including LASIK, PRK, and lens implant surgeries. All of these are outpatient procedures and have similar recovery arcs. We will explore those similarities and differences and give you the knowledge you need to prepare for surgery and for recovery afterward.



## What to Expect Immediately After Surgery

No matter what kind of vision surgery you are undergoing, you will need to arrange to have someone drive you home afterward. Some people experience immediate improvement with their vision, but others experience varying degrees of blurred vision. You will also most likely experience some burning and/or itching in your eyes directly after the surgery. You may feel like you have something in your eyes and they may water more than usual. These are all normal reactions and are no cause for alarm.

Because all of these surgeries take less than 20 minutes to perform, you may be tempted to go straight back to work afterward, but it is far better to take the rest of the day off and rest. You're most likely going to feel some mild discomfort in the hours after your procedure, but it is of utmost importance that you do not rub or scratch your eyes. Use the eye drops that your surgeon gives you as directed and get plenty of rest, especially in the first few hours after surgery.





## What Will the First Few Hours and Days of Recovery Look Like?

In the first few hours after surgery, you might experience increased light sensitivity and/or blurred vision. You may also experience halos, flashes, and starbursts. If you look in the mirror, you will most likely notice that your eyes are somewhat bloodshot. This is nothing to be concerned about. Within a few hours your vision should stabilize, and your eyes should become less and less bloodshot until they return to their normal white color.

You can expect some continued variation in blurring, auras, and other visual effects for the first few days, but this should dissipate as time goes on. Your vision may continue to fluctuate for several weeks.

Do not wear any eye makeup, and avoid getting any soap or other cleansers in your eyes during the first couple of weeks. For the first week after surgery, you will also want to wear protective eye shields at night to avoid accidentally rubbing your eyes in your sleep.



Your eye doctor will schedule an appointment to see you within 24-48 hours after your surgery for a preliminary examination to make sure that everything is healing properly. After that, you should schedule regular appointments with your eye doctor for the next 6 months. Then you should go back to seeing your ophthalmologist for regular eye exams.

## Will There Be Pain Involved?

The local anesthetic used during surgery will prevent you from feeling anything but a mild discomfort. During LASIK, some patients report an “awkward” sensation when the suction device is used to create the corneal flap before reshaping the cornea. At no point in the surgery should you feel significant pain.

After surgery you will feel some discomfort, but if you experience any sharp or severe pain, you should contact your eye doctor immediately. Burning, itching, the feeling of having something in the eye, dry eyes, and watering are all to be expected for the first few hours and/or days after surgery, but it should not be truly painful.

LASIK usually does not require any pain relievers. However, after lens implant surgery for cataracts and PRK, some eye doctors will recommend taking an over-the-counter pain reliever like ibuprofen or acetaminophen (Tylenol) to deal with mild pain or pressure in and/or around the eyes.

Your eyes heal incredibly quickly, and that itching and burning sensation is evidence that your eyes are recovering normally.



**You may also experience a little bit of pain due to light sensitivity, but this is easily counteracted with a pair of dark glasses to protect your eyes. Other than that, there should be no noticeable pain after your vision surgery.**



## When Can I Go Back to Work?

While it is unwise to return to work immediately after surgery, you don't need to take a lot of time off. In fact, most patients are able to return to work the day after their procedures.

Your return to work will be largely dependent on your vision recovery. If you are still experiencing blurred vision, you should not drive a vehicle and should probably take an extra day off work. You may also want to arrange for someone to drive you to your follow-up appointment with your eye doctor just to ensure that you arrive safely in case you're still experiencing issues with your vision.

It is very rare to need an extra day off work, and most patients are able to drive and perform normal daily tasks within 24 hours of surgery. Be sure to use the eye drops that your doctor gives you as directed during this time. Your eyes may feel better and may not feel dry, but they are still healing, and eye drops will help reduce inflammation and resist infection.

You should not, however, return to strenuous activities yet. If your job involves heavy lifting or intense aerobic exercise, talk with your eye doctor about taking a few extra days off work to ensure that you don't complicate your recovery. Likewise, if your work environment is very dusty or there is a risk of getting any particulate matter in your eyes at work, talk to your doctor about wearing proper eye protection at least until your eyes are healed, if not afterward.



## Resuming Light Physical Activity After Surgery

If you exercise regularly, your doctor will likely recommend that you refrain from any strenuous workouts for the first week or two after surgery. Most runners are able to resume running after 3-7 days as long as they wear eye protection (sunglasses or eye shields).

While swimming is considered a low- or no-impact sport and is great for aerobic exercise, you should avoid it for at least the first 2 weeks after surgery. Contact with chlorine or salt water can irritate your eyes and cause problems with the healing process.

Most eye doctors will strongly recommend against engaging in contact sports for at least a month after surgery to ensure that your eyes have healed enough to take an impact without damaging your vision.

If you have any questions about getting back to your usual exercise regimen or starting a new routine after vision surgery, talk to your ophthalmologist.



# When Can I Expect Everything to Feel Normal Again?

Every patient is different, and so every recovery is different. However, for most people the majority of the recovery takes place in the first few days. You will most likely have almost entirely normal (and vastly improved!) vision again within 2-4 days after surgery.

However, that is not the entirety of the healing process. You can expect some instabilities in your vision – blurring, auras, etc. – for the first few months after vision surgery. As your eyes heal, these instabilities will become fewer and farther between, and your vision will become more and more stable until you notice no visual anomalies at all.

Remember, though, that while you may feel completely normal again after only 2 months, the entire healing process really takes about 6 months. So don't skip appointments with your eye doctor just because you feel great and are seeing better than you have in years. Your ophthalmologist can catch potential issues with your vision that you might never have otherwise noticed.

**Every patient is different, and so every recovery is different.**





## Are There Side Effects That I Should Watch Out For?

Normal side effects after surgery include light sensitivity, blurred vision, auras, dry eyes, itchy eyes, and/or redness. All of these issues should fade within the first few hours or days after surgery. If you are still experiencing any or all of them weeks or months after surgery, talk to your ophthalmologist and schedule an examination.

In rare cases, some adverse lasting side effects may occur, including problems with the shape of the cornea or, in the case of LASIK, in the corneal flap. Because the changes made to the cornea in LASIK and PRK procedures is permanent, complications may occur during surgery that alter your vision permanently. Again, these are very rare cases, and you can discuss your risk factors with your eye surgeon before you commit to a procedure.

Also rarely, PRK and LASIK surgery can result in loss of your “best” vision; that is the best correction you had when using contact lenses or glasses. In this case you may need a pair of light prescription glasses or contacts for certain tasks. Again, this is a rare case.

After lens implant surgery, some people experience a decrease in sharp focus at night or in other dim light situations. Fortunately, though, our brains are incredibly powerful and adaptable, and most people adapt to this change in their vision without any problem at all.



## An Easy Surgery With an Easier Recovery and Amazing Results

All in all, the recovery process for PRK, LASIK, or lens implant surgery is an incredibly easy one. The surgery is painless and takes only a few minutes per eye. You can be in and out of the office in a matter of an hour or two, and then after 12-24 hours of resting, you will be able to resume working and going about your normal daily tasks and activities.

Unlike other routine surgeries, vision surgery doesn't require prescription pain medication to manage a lot of pain after surgery. In fact, with the possible exception of over-the-counter pain relievers such as Tylenol or ibuprofen, recovery doesn't usually involve any pain medication at all.

Side effects are usually mild and temporary, and risks during and after surgery are very rare.

**Overall, vision surgery is quick and easy, and has one of the fastest recovery processes in all of medicine.**







Armed with this information, you should now be ready to proceed with your vision surgery, knowing what to expect throughout the recovery process. Remember that some discomfort is to be expected, but your recovery should not be significantly painful. Make sure that you visit your eye doctor regularly, and follow all instructions and recommendations from your doctor to ensure that your eyes heal completely, and you get the most benefit from your vision surgery.

**For more information about vision correction surgery,  
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