

Bright light, big worry

If having your corneas pulverized by a laser makes you nervous, consider one of these less-invasive eye-openers

Only 1 percent of LASIK patients experience serious complications, but if being led around by a Seeing Eye dog figures high on your list of irrational fears, then maybe you're not ready to join the 1.28 million Americans who underwent laser surgery in 2004. "LASIK is still the procedure for people whose prescriptions aren't too high and who have thick enough corneas, but there are other options," says Susan Resnick, a New York City-based optometrist affiliated with the TLC Laser Eye Center. Here are the pros and cons of several cutting-edge plan Bs. AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN

NEXT-GENERATION CONTACT LENSES

If you're tired of having to do constant wash-and-wear maintenance on your current contacts, we have good news: The FDA recently approved lenses that can stay in your eyes for a month straight. The new gas-permeable lenses from Ciba Vision and Bausch & Lomb allow six times more oxygen to reach the cornea than old-school contacts, and they create a more comfortable feel. **Price** \$200 to \$250 per year

A NIGHT BRACE FOR YOUR EYES

In a new technique called *Corneal Refractive Therapy*, a doctor can fit your eyes with special lenses that reshape your corneas while you're sleeping. That means you won't have to wear glasses or traditional contacts during the day. The downside is that you have to wear the special lenses indefinitely. "If you stop wearing this retainer for your eye, you lose the benefits," says Mark Milner, M.D., an assistant



"DOCTOR, MY EYES"
You can see clearly now.

clinical professor at the Yale University School of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology.

Price \$800 to \$1,500 for both eyes

LASER-FREE SURGERY If you're too nearsighted for LASIK or have thin or damaged corneas, look into a procedure in which an eye surgeon implants a permanent corrective lens between your cornea and iris. Called the *Verisyse lens*, it has been available in Europe for roughly 19 years, but the FDA approved it Stateside only last year. A small percentage of patients experience halos and develop cataracts, but the chance of getting an eye infection is less than with normal contacts. "Once the Verisyse is inside the eye, bacteria can't access the lens as with an external contact lens," says Kerrey Assil, M.D., medical director of the Assil Sinsky Eye Institute, in Santa Monica, California. **Price** \$7,000 to \$8,000 for both eyes

HOW TO PICK A LASIK SURGEON

3 questions to keep a doctor from blinding you with BS

- 1 Ask a potential surgeon, "What are your success and complication rates?" Serious problems, such as loss of vision requiring corneal implants, should occur in less than 1 percent of patients, and less-serious ones, like halos or glare, should occur no more than 3 to 5 percent of the time.
- 2 Check whether the doctor offers custom LASIK, a procedure that uses wavefront technology to increase accuracy, which results in fewer complications.
- 3 Additionally, ask, "Who takes care of your patients before and after their operations?" Lower-priced doctors may palm you off on an assistant once the procedure is done. Custom LASIK costs about \$3,400 to \$5,000 for both eyes. "If they're doing it for \$899 an eye, they may be cutting corners," says ophthalmologist Mark Milner, M.D.

For more information on how to pick a LASIK surgeon, go to fda.gov/cdrh/lasik.