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## Advances in lasers open eyes

Author: Sagario Dawn

Author: Staff

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By DAWN SAGARIO

REGISTER STAFF WRITER

AmyAnn Pearson had made up her mind.

After relying on glasses and contact lenses for more than half of her life, the mother of two from Urbandale wanted to be free of it all.

"I had been thinking about Lasik for years," said Pearson, 36. The procedure improves vision by using a laser to permanently change the shape of the cornea - the clear, front part of the eye that helps to focus light onto the retina.

But when she visited Des Moines ophthalmologist Dr. S. Ejaz Husain in September, he suggested a procedure called "advanced surface ablation" instead.

The technique - which, unlike Lasik, does not require a "flap" to be made in the cornea - is just one of two major developments in the field of laser vision correction, said Husain, with Associated Ophthalmologists PC in Des Moines.

The other involves giving patients more customized treatments, which in some cases, physicians say, may give patients better vision than they had with glasses or contacts.

Husain and other physicians are giving patients more individualized care with what's called "wavefront-guided" surgery.

This gives doctors a more detailed map, or "fingerprint," of the unique characteristics of a patient's eyes.

"It's really a combination of the two that has really made a big difference," Husain said.

While Lasik remains a safe and viable option for many patients, Husain said the results of pairing advanced surface ablation and customized treatment "may be slightly better."

The flap-free procedure, like the one done in Pearson's case, involves removing the surface cells on the cornea before reshaping the cornea with a laser.

It also entails a slightly longer recovery time and a little more discomfort, Husain said.

The advanced surface ablation is best for patients with thin corneas, dry eyes or certain occupations like firefighting, law enforcement or those in the armed forces, Husain said. "The baby boomer population really suffers from dry eyes."

The custom treatments, which Husain uses on all of his patients, are about 25 times more precise than the standard methods, he said. They've also been shown to reduce some problems like glare and "halos" associated with night vision.

Before Pearson's Jan. 19 operation, her vision was 20/600; people are considered to be legally blind in the United States when their corrected vision is 20/200 or worse.

Her corrected vision now is 20/15 - better than "normal," or 20/20, vision.

"It's awesome to get out of bed and see" without having to put on glasses, said Pearson, who paid about \$4,300 for the surgery, which was not covered by insurance. "It's an amazing feeling." It took her about five days to recover from the surgery. She had to keep her eyes shut as much as possible for the three days following the operation to facilitate the healing.

About three months later, Pearson is excited about the upcoming summer. She's looking forward to spending time with her 4-year-old and 7-year-old at the pool and playing outside without the worry of losing a contact lens.

"It's fantastic," she said. "It was totally worth it."

Reporter Dawn Sagario can be reached at (515) 284-8351 or dsagario@dmreg.com

PHOTOS BY: JUSTIN HAYWORTH/THE REGISTER

- After relying on glasses and contact lenses for more than half of her life, AmyAnn Pearson, 36, wanted to be free of it all. So she decided to have advanced surface ablation. Prior to the operation, Pearson's vision was 20/600; her corrected vision now is now 20/15, better than normal vision.

- AmyAnn Pearson tries to take the basketball away from her son, Jack, 7, during a game of horse.

- After having a laser procedure called advanced surface ablation, AmyAnn Pearson loves playing outside with her children, Jack, 7, and Grace, 4, without contacts or glasses worries. "It's awesome to get out of bed and see" without having to put on glasses, she said. "It's an amazing feeling."

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