

Frequently Asked Questions About Small Incision Lenticule Extraction

INTERVIEW WITH SHAMIK BAFNA, MD, WHO PRACTICES AT THE CLEVELAND EYE CLINIC AND CLEAR CHOICE CUSTOM LASIK CENTER IN CLEVELAND, OHIO.



Patients are becoming more familiar with the term “Small Incision Lenticule Extraction,” or “SMILE,” (ZEISS), and in doing their research and talking to other patients, they are learning the advantages of this new refractive procedure. Shamik Bafna, MD, has found that patients are seeking him out to learn if they are candidates for this procedure.

My LASIK results are near-perfect, so why should I buy another laser to perform SMILE?

SMILE appeals to many people who may not have been interested in LASIK for various reasons. Perhaps they were concerned about having issues related to a LASIK flap as part of their procedure. SMILE is a good alternative for those individuals, and in my practice we have found that many patients come to us specifically for this procedure.

How will adding the VisuMax femtosecond laser (ZEISS) for flaps and SMILE grow my business?

Patients find SMILE to be a much gentler experience, particularly if they have discussed refractive surgery with someone who has had LASIK or PRK. The gentle nature of surgery with the VisuMax laser is not exclusive to SMILE, as creating a LASIK flap with it is just as gentle. Thus, we can offer patients a more comfortable experience, whether they are best suited for femto-LASIK or SMILE. Over time, you will find that many people, through word of mouth, will seek you out to learn about this procedure.

What is the typical learning curve for initial SMILE cases?

As with any new procedure, there is a learning curve for SMILE. I suggest that surgeons first become comfortable using the VisuMax laser to create flaps for about 50 LASIK cases. This allows the surgeon to become familiar with system operation, laser docking, and the lower, cornea-only suction of the VisuMax laser. After that, about 10 to 20 SMILE cases should get you through your learning curve.

How is the patient’s WOW factor for SMILE compared with LASIK after surgery?

SMILE is a very comfortable procedure, and after the surgery, patients typically comment that the experience was not what they expected. We frequently treat patients whose friends or family members underwent LASIK or PRK with us, so they are prepared to have a similar experience. With SMILE, the low vacuum, small incision, and overall gentle experience help to create the WOW factor.

How should I position SMILE to optometrists?

Let optometrists know that, among the many great options for laser vision correction, SMILE represents a new alternative for patients. Many optometrists see patients who are interested in laser vision correction, but for many patients, the idea of a LASIK flap creates a barrier of fear that prevents them from moving forward with surgery.

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What if a secondary treatment is required after SMILE?

If an enhancement is required after SMILE, the surgeon has the option to perform a surface ablation enhancement when the patient has reached postoperative stability. Similar to all other forms of refractive enhancements, the surgeon will need to take into account the patient's expectations, residual refractive error, residual stromal bed, and other factors that help guide the enhancement decision.

Is SMILE as reliable and predictable as LASIK?

SMILE is just as accurate as LASIK in the lower prescription levels. For higher prescriptions, -6.00 D and above, in my practice I have found that SMILE is often more accurate than LASIK, because the amount of ablation tends to be consistent when correcting a low prescription or a higher prescription. ■

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