

# THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

## Go ahead, have a Lasik!

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This morning, I saw a TV ad for Lasik eye surgery and that got me wondering, “What’s happened to the price of Lasik since I had my procedure 10 years ago?” We hear a lot about the rising cost of healthcare. (By the way, how is that Obamacare working out for you?) But, what about elective medical procedures – you know, the ones that patients pay for themselves? And so I called the ophthalmologist who performed my Lasik operation (with superb results, I might add) to find out the details.

Back in 2005, he charged \$3,500 for fixing nearsightedness and astigmatism in both eyes, or \$4,264 in 2015 dollars. Today, he charges \$3,000. That amounts to a real price reduction of 30 percent. In the meantime, average hourly earnings of production and nonsupervisory employees (a close approximation to the quintessential “blue collar worker”), rose from \$15.91 in January 2005 to \$20.80 in January 2015. So, an ordinary American needed to work for 220 hours to afford a Lasik surgery in 2005. S/he needs to work 144 hours to afford the same procedure today. That’s a 35 percent decrease in terms of work time.

And, as my doctor reminded me, the price was not the only thing that has changed. Lasik machines today are significantly more precise, achieving 20/20 vision with greater regularity for nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism. They are much safer and disastrous complications, such as the loss of sight, have become even rarer (i.e., Lasik has been a very safe procedure for a very long time). The doctors performing the operation are more experienced and the screening of potentially problematic patients has improved.

Candidly, my doctor has admitted that the prices could come down even more. One reason for Lasik prices being what they are is that only ophthalmologists are allowed to perform Lasik operations. Optometrists, however, are banned. And, of course, there is immigration, which makes it super difficult for foreign doctors to work in the United States.

Still, relative to 10 years ago, today a prospective Lasik patient enjoys the benefits of better and safer machines, and a price/time reduction of 35 percent. Not bad, not bad at all. Please visit [HumanProgress](#) and search for “cost of cosmetic procedures” to see how other elective medical procedures have become cheaper over time.

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