

MORE US SOLDIERS OPT FOR IMPLANTABLE LENSES

The use of implantable lenses is increasing in popularity in the United States army, according to Colonel Scott Barnes, ophthalmology chief at the Warfighter Refractive Eye Clinic at Womack Army Medical Centre in North Carolina.

More than 400 lenses have been implanted since June 2007,

and these lenses are now being offered to soldiers with high myopia.

The procedure was officially given the green light when a lens remained in place even after foreign particles from a grenade explosion entered the eye of a soldier — which proved the lens' durability.

Colonel Barnes said yesterday that 75 per cent of US soldiers found that the implanted lenses offered better vision than contact lenses.

However, photo refractive keratectomy — a laser surgery that reshapes the cornea — remains the main choice for the US army. ALICIA WONG

EYESIGHT CORRECTION

Unsuitable for Lasik? Try lens implants

Better option for those with high myopia of above 800 degrees

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SINGAPORE — Those with severe myopia, or whose eyes are unsuitable for Lasik have another option to rectify their eyesight. That was what long-time contact lens wearer Karen Lee, 41, found out last month.

Ms Lee's naturally-thin cornea meant that she could not go for Lasik surgery.

Moreover, because she had high myopia — 1,700 degrees for her right eye and 1,050 degrees for the left — and could not wear contact lenses any longer due to a damaged cornea, wearing glasses was the only, if uncomfortable option, for her.

But after consulting her ophthalmologist, the housewife decided to have permanent contact lenses implanted in her eyes.

"I was quite sceptical at first," she recounted. But after a 10-minute pain-free surgery, Ms Lee could continue with daily activities within half a day.

Once viewed as just an alternative for people who are unsuitable for the popular Lasik surgery, implantable lenses are increasingly being offered as an alternative.

The lenses are touted to last a lifetime, and need no maintenance, according to The Eye and Cornea Transplant Centre medical director, Mr Leonard Ang.

"There is a growing pool of surgeons more familiar with putting in ICL (Implantable Contact Lens, the main brand of lenses used in such procedures here)," he said.

About 15 surgeons in private and public practice, such as the Singapore National Eye Centre, are more confident of using this as a treatment option for people who are short-sighted, long-sighted and/or have astigmatism. On average, myopic Singaporeans suffer from

shortsightedness of between 500 to 700 degrees.

Compared to Lasik, this procedure offers better results for those with very high myopia (above 800 degrees), said Dr Ang, although he recommends Lasik, which is cheaper and less invasive, for those whose degree is less than 600.

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Using ICL, surgeons make a 3mm incision in the eye and insert the folded lens behind the iris, in front of the natural lens. The lens, as thick as a strand of hair, will unfold in the eye.

Some side effects, said Dr Ang, include a higher likelihood of developing cataracts and infection. Based on published data, he added, the risk of complication is less than 1 per cent. The lens can be removed if the need arises.

In Singapore, only about 300 patients have undergone this procedure since 2005 — compared to the 30,000 eyes operated on each year for Lasik, which was introduced in Singapore almost 15 years ago. Over the last 12 years, 180,000 lenses have been implanted worldwide, compared to a few million Lasik surgeries annually.

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