



Q&A with Dr. Jeff: What is laser dentistry?

Of all the dental trends that pop up, laser dentistry might be the most futuristic. But is laser dentistry safe and effective?

Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, chief dental officer at Delta Dental of Iowa, answers top questions about this dental trend.

Q: What is laser dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: Laser dentistry is an emerging treatment that essentially uses a laser to replace the dental drill and/or a scalpel blade. The same dental procedure is performed, but it relies on a laser rather than the traditional tool.

Q: What are the benefits of laser dentistry over traditional dentistry? Any downsides?

Dr. Chaffin: One of the biggest benefits of laser dentistry is comfort. Patients report less pain and discomfort with the use of lasers. Plus, healing times seem to be faster when a laser is used compared with traditional instruments. There is also a lower chance of the patient developing a bacterial infection and having tissue damage when a laser is used.

The biggest concern over lasers is the additional cost. The laser “machines” are expensive, and dentists are likely to pass some of that cost back to the patient.

Q: Is laser dentistry safe?

Dr. Chaffin: Yes, laser dentistry is safe. Protective eyewear for the patient and clinical staff is very important to prevent any eye injury.

Q: How can I tell whether my dentist is a credible laser dentistry provider?

Dr. Chaffin: Before treating patients with a laser, dentists normally go through significant additional training. Patients should feel empowered to talk about that training with their dentist, so don't hesitate to ask before undergoing a laser procedure.

Q: What types of dental procedures can be done via laser dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: One of the biggest uses of lasers is to treat gum problems. Lasers can recontour the gums to be more cosmetic and functional. Another common use for lasers is to treat “tongue tied” children – where the laser is used to cut a small piece of tissue called the

frenum under the tongue. Additional uses for lasers in dentistry include finding cavities, filling cavities and teeth whitening.

Q: Does laser dentistry cost more than traditional dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: Patients should have conversations with their dentist about the cost of laser dentistry. Usually, new technology tends to cost more, so knowing the cost before you undergo the procedure is important to prevent any billing surprises.

Q: What patients are particularly good candidates for laser dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: Some of the best candidates are those with gum disease who want reduced recovery time with less pain.

Diabetic retinopathy: How diabetes affects vision

Diabetes is a condition that affects your whole body. If you don't manage your blood sugar closely, you can develop diabetes-related complications that can harm your quality of life. One of these complications is called diabetic retinopathy, which affects your vision.

Here, we explain the basics of diabetic retinopathy, including how you can protect the long-term health of your eyesight.

What is diabetic retinopathy and what causes it?

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when the blood vessels in your retina (a layer of tissue in the back of your eye) become swollen and leaky, which can affect the clarity of your vision. The condition can also trigger the formation of new, abnormal blood vessels in the back of the eye that can harm your sight.

The condition is caused by poorly managed blood sugar levels. When you fail to control your blood sugar, it affects the health of your blood vessels throughout your entire body, including those in your eyes.

People with any type of diabetes are at risk for developing diabetic retinopathy, and the condition usually affects both eyes.

What happens when diabetic retinopathy goes untreated?

When diabetic retinopathy first develops, you may not experience any symptoms, so your vision won't be affected. But as it progresses, your eyesight will change. Your vision will become blurry, and you may have an increasing amount of floaters in your vision. If you ignore these vision changes and don't call an eye care professional, you may develop blindness.

Treating diabetic retinopathy

Your eye doctor will determine the right treatment for you based on how far your diabetic retinopathy has progressed. In earlier stages, eye injections that reduce swelling may be the preferred option. If injections are not enough to restore vision, your doctor may recommend laser surgery to treat the blood vessels in the eye or surgery to remove excess fluid from your eye.

Keeping your eye health protected when you have diabetes

To prevent diabetic retinopathy, keep two main strategies in mind: Controlling your blood sugar and keeping regular eye exams.

When you have well-managed blood sugar levels, you not only feel better, but you prevent several major health complications. Maintaining healthy blood sugar levels will protect the blood vessels in your eyes and prevent diabetic retinopathy. Healthy blood sugar levels may even help restore lost vision if you already have diabetic retinopathy. Exercise, healthy diet and medications all work together to help you manage your blood sugar.

In addition to keeping your blood sugar in check, you need to see an eye care professional regularly for exams. If you notice any changes in vision, give your vision provider a call. Even if you have no vision problems, keeping regular appointments with an eye specialist is one of your strongest defenses against the major complications associated with diabetic retinopathy. An eye specialist can detect the signs of diabetic retinopathy at its early stages, even before you notice anything wrong with your vision. The earlier diabetic retinopathy is detected, the easier it is to treat.

Do you need help finding a vision provider near you? Check out our online Find a Provider tool to easily locate an eye professional.

SOURCES:

<https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-diabetic-retinopathy>

<https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/diabetic-retinopathy>

<https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions/diabetic-retinopathy?sso=y>