Ocular Laser Therapy
Photocoagulation

This handout will tell you what to expect before, during, and after ocular laser treatment (photocoagulation). You may want to jot down any questions you have so you can ask your doctor or nurse about it before the treatment.

What Is Laser Therapy?
Laser therapy (photocoagulation) uses a beam of light (laser beam) to treat diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration, retinal tears, and an array of other eye problems. Laser treatment helps to prevent the growth of new blood vessels in people with diabetic retinopathy. These new vessels, if left untreated, can cause loss of vision by bleeding, or can cause scarring and retinal detachment. Lasers are also used to reduce swelling that affects the macula (the part of the retina that helps you to read). Laser treatment is done on an outpatient basis. It takes about 30-60 minutes.

Before the Treatment
• The technician or doctor will use an eye chart to test your vision.
• Your eye will be dilated with eye drops.
• When the eye has been dilated, your doctor will take you to the laser room where he will give you a local anesthetic. In some cases, eye drops are used to numb the eye. In other cases, the anesthetic may be injected into the tissues around the eye to numb the area.

During the Treatment
• You will be seated at the laser with your head in a headrest, as for an eye exam.
• A contact lens is held in position on your eye to help focus the light. You may feel the lens but the local anesthetic will prevent it from being painful.
• A bright beam of light (a laser beam) will be directed into your eye on to tiny spots on the retina.
• The treatment may last only a few minutes or up to ½ hour. This depends on your condition.
After the Treatment

- You may have mild discomfort, pain, or a headache which may require pain pills such as Acetaminophen.
- If you received an injection, your eye may remain numb for a few hours after the laser treatment. A patch will be placed over the eye to protect it from foreign objects. Please keep the patch in place for 4 to 5 hours after the laser treatments or as directed by your doctor.

Special Instructions

Someone will need to drive you home. Do not plan to drive home yourself. You may have blurred vision for several days to 6 weeks after the treatment. The blurring most often decreases as the eye heals. In rare cases, the blurring may be permanent. If you have sudden loss of vision or severe pain in the treated eye, call the Eye Clinic right away.

For patients who were treated for diabetic new blood vessels. Patients may have partial loss of side (peripheral) vision and/or decreased night vision. Very rarely, damage to the central vision or optic nerve may result in serious permanent loss of vision. Even with laser therapy, symptoms may get worse and bleeding in the eye or retinal detachment may still occur.

For patients who were treated for diabetic swelling of the retina: Your vision may be temporarily blurrier. The swelling of the macula may take months to improve.

For patients treated for a retinal tear or detachment, please let the clinic know if your symptoms are worse or there is a dark curtain in your side vision after the treatment.

Ask your doctor if you have any weight or activity restrictions.

Clinic Visits
Your doctor will want to see you in a few days to several months after treatment. Further treatment may be needed. This depends on your eye condition.
Phone Numbers

University Station Eye Clinic, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday (608) 263-7171

When the clinic is closed, your call will be forwarded to the hospital paging operator. Ask for the “Eye Resident on Call”. Give the operator your name and phone number with area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, call 1-800-323-8942 and ask to be transferred to the above number.

Please call if you have any questions or concerns.