

Corrective Eye Surgery

Introduction

If TV adverts are anything to go by, then the number of people opting for corrective eye surgery is on the increase. If you are considering such surgery, then reads on. In any event don't rush-in, take time to consider the options and both the advantages disadvantages.

Take the time to talk to your surgeon ask how many operations of this type has s/he done and the success rate. Don't forget to tell your surgeon that you are a diver and ask the recovery time required before you can dive again.

The Need for Good Sight Underwater

Clearly you will want to see all that's going on during any dive, but it's the need to manage your dive that's of paramount importance: you must be able to clearly see all your gauges when underwater so that you can make the right decision: ie when to terminate the dive, the maximum depth of the dive, where and when to make Deep-Stops etc, etc.

Should I correct my Sight Underwater?

If you normally use glasses to read you will almost certainly need them underwater. You can have your mask fitted with either standard magnifying reading lenses in the bottom section of your mask, prescription reading lenses or bi-focal lenses. Keep in mind that if you only use a lens for reading you may be able to get away with fitting only one lens; think about it, see Fig 1.

Some people use contact lenses. This is potentially dangerous: because if you have an unexpected mask floods the contact lenses may be washed out, leaving you unable to see your gauges! Other people opt for eye surgery. By and large this is OK provided that sufficient time is allowed for full recovery before diving again.





Recovery can take some time, six months or more. Not good if you are about to go on holiday.

However, Radial keratotomy (RK) a procedure used to correct near-sightedness (myopia) is considered unacceptable for Scuba divers. Essentially, the procedure involves making radial incisions in the cornea, rather akin to the spokes of a bicycle wheel, radiating outwards from the pupil. Apparently, the incisions may cut through the cornea to a depth of up to 90%. This weakens the cornea allowing it to flatten and so adjusting the focal length of the eye. The US Navy has banned its divers from using this procedure.

There are a number of other problems associated with RK: reduced night vision, increased difficulty with glare (such as from a wet windscreen at night) and vision changes due to pressure variations eg pressure changes at altitude (flying), and hyperbaric changes due to diving.

Whatever procedure you are contemplating, ask about the risks and disadvantages.

Finally

Be sure that your Eye Surgeon knows how your operation will be affected by diving, don't make assumptions - Ask and insist on an understandable answer. If you are unsure take a step back from the edge and think about it.

Safe Diving and Kind regards

Bob Cole

SAA Decompression Officer

CMAS Technical Director

