

What to know about Lasik eye surgery following the suicide of a Detroit meteorologist

December 16 2018, by Rachel Desantis, New York Daily News

Jessica Starr, a meteorologist at a local station in Detroit, should have been happier on Nov. 13.

It was the 35-year-old's first day back at work since she'd had Lasik SMILE eye [surgery](#) a month earlier, and the mother of two was excited to "get back" to her old life.

But Starr was struggling with lingering symptoms—her eyes were still dry, and her vision still foggy.

"I have a tad side of dry eyes, so I have to use a lot of drops. When the drops are in, I can see clear, but then they fade pretty quickly," she said in a Facebook Live video.

She even asked fellow Facebook fans for advice: "I'm dying over here. ... This recovery is brutal," she wrote to one.

A day later, she sent off what would be her final tweet: "Yesterday was a struggle for me. I really wanted to come back but I need more time to recover. Please keep me in your thoughts during this challenging time."

And then on Wednesday, Starr committed suicide.

There has been nothing to link Starr's suicide to her surgery—and

statistics show that her complaints put her in the minority.

The Journal of Cataract and Refractive Surgery reports that 96 percent of patients are satisfied with the outcome of their Lasik surgery—and more than 9.5 million Americans have had the surgery, according to The New York Times, including stars like Tiger Woods, Courteney Cox and Brad Pitt.

The Mayo Clinic also reports that 8 out of 10 patients are able to happily ditch their glasses and contact lenses after surgery.

"Do bad outcomes sometimes occur? Yes. But the risk is extremely low," Dr. Eric Donnenfeld, former president of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, told The Times.

But for the few who do endure bad outcomes, the results can be devastating.

Canadian outlet CTV-W5 spoke to a pair of patients whose laser eye surgeries prompted years of chronic, stabbing pain and suicidal thoughts.

And then there are the cases of Paul Fitzgerald and Max Cronin, who both committed suicide as a result of botched eye surgeries.

Fitzpatrick, a 54-year-old Canadian, killed himself in October due to the intense pain he experienced as a result of a "badly performed" [laser eye surgery](#) 20 years prior.

"I cannot experience any type of pleasure anymore," he reportedly wrote in his suicide note. "Just the pain of burning eyes inside my head and throughout myself. ... Since 1996 pain, pain and more pain, please forgive me for not being strong enough to cope."

Fitzpatrick's family said he constantly suffered from migraines and dry eyes, and had been searching for a cure since the doomed procedure.

Cronin, an American military veteran, had two surgeries, and after the second—which was only supposed to be an "enhancement"—started having severe pain that he described as "needles sticking into his eyes continuously."

His mother, Nancy Burleson, told CTV that doctors told him it was just dry eye and that it'd go away, but it didn't, and after having to quit school and give up driving, Cronin committed suicide in 2016.

Boston-based Dr. Pedram Hamrah told the outlet a rare complication called corneal neuralgia is often misdiagnosed because it looks the same as dry eye. In reality, it's severe [pain](#) cause by damaged nerves in the cornea.

Still, Hamrah said that doctors are working hard to determine why these complications only affect certain patients—and that he's "confident that we can find what the [risk factors](#) are and exclude them from Lasik."

Lasik involves doctors cutting a flap in the cornea with a laser, then using another to reshape the tissue so that light is focused correctly onto the retina. It's an elective surgery that typically costs anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per eye.

A January 2017 clinical trial by the Food and Drug Administration, though too small to produce "meaningful results," found that 28 percent of participants developed dry eyes after the surgery, and 45 percent said they had a new visual aberration three months after surgery.

The FDA notes on its website that "most patients are very pleased" by the results of their surgery, but makes mention of possible side effects,

including loss of vision, dry eyes and the fact that results may diminish with age for farsighted patients.

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