

“US IRS: Cost Of LASIK Eye Surgery May Be Tax Deductible”

By Jennifer Corbett Dooren
15 May 2003
Dow Jones International News

WASHINGTON -(Dow Jones)- The cost of LASIK eye correction surgery may be tax deductible the Internal Revenue Service said Thursday.

Under current law taxpayers with medical expenses that total more than 7.5% of their annual incomes can deduct those costs if they itemize.

LASIK (an acronym for Laser-Assisted In Situ Keratomileusis, a procedure that permanently changes the shape of the cornea) surgery involves using laser to correct vision problems and costs about \$3,000. Most insurance carriers don't pay for it.

But, because the procedure "meaningfully promotes the proper function of the body," LASIK qualifies as medical expense that can be deducted, the IRS said.

The IRS also said that procedures to whiten teeth are not deductible because they don't "treat a physical or mental disease or promote the proper function of the body."

Other cosmetic procedures like breast enhancement also cannot be deducted. But a person having breast reconstruction after a mastectomy to treat breast cancer could write off expenses related to that procedure that are not covered by insurance.

The IRS also said any out-of-pocket expenses for prescription drugs and insulin qualify as deductible medical expenses. But, nonprescription items such as aspirin don't qualify, even if a doctor recommends a patient take aspirin on a regular basis.

Certain over-the-counter items like crutches, bandages and blood sugar testing kits also qualify as a deductible medical expense.

However, the total of all qualified medical expenses must be greater than 7.5% of adjusted gross income and they must be expenses that were not covered by insurance.

The IRS discussed the tax treatment of medical expenses in revenue rulings 2003-57 and 2003-58. They will be published in the Internal Revenue Service bulletin dated June 2, 2003. The rulings and the bulletin can be found on the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov.