

HOME

SJ READERS' POLL

Will the economy affect how much you contribute to SJ charities this year?

- I'm cutting back on all spending - including donations.
- My contributions will be the same.
- I'm trying to donate as much as I can, but it's difficult.
- I don't usually contribute to charity.

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FEEDBACK

SJ RESTAURANTS

...from issue on 7/2008

SJ DEPARTMENTS

Better, Faster, Cheaper

New surgeries improve patients' lives

By Julie Walsh

No one likes the idea of having surgery. But medical advances are making many operations more effective and less risky. Patients can even recover more quickly and experience less pain with the newer techniques.

These advances include a laser that unblocks leg arteries, a tool that removes fibroids (growths) from the uterus without surgery, and less-invasive knee-replacement methods.

Plus, you needn't travel far for these procedures. Doctors right here in Southern New Jersey are among the first to perform some of them.

Leg-artery laser

A new laser treatment offers an alternative to traditional angioplasty for blocked leg arteries. Like balloon angioplasty, the Spectranetics Excimer Laser requires only a small nick in the skin, rather than an incision. But it carries several advantages over standard angioplasty, and over more-invasive methods like bypass surgery and stents.



For instance, the laser can restore blood flow through long segments of blocked arteries, and it can work better on arteries that bend, such as those at the knee or hip, says **Randy Mintz, MD**, of Lourdes Health System.

"It can enhance treatment to small vessels below the knee," adds the interventional cardiologist. "It may help at branching locations" (where arteries form a "Y" like a tree branch).

Blocked arteries can reduce blood flow in the legs, causing pain, cramping or fatigue. A person's quality of life can suffer, says Dr. Mintz, as they're less able to walk and be active.

In severe cases, people can develop sores or wounds that don't heal, which can even necessitate amputation of the leg, foot or toes.

The Excimer Laser produces bursts of ultraviolet light energy that vaporize fatty plaque (atherosclerosis) or blood clots blocking the arteries. The laser is on the tip of a thin catheter that is inserted into the artery through the skin.

Like balloon angioplasty, laser treatment requires less wound healing than other treatments. That's especially important for diabetics, who have difficulty healing. "There's less discomfort," says Dr. Mintz. "It keeps people more active."

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