

## Health Info to know with Dr. Joe

Expert advice with Head and Neck surgeon and University of Florida Associate Professor, Dr. Joe Parell.

Dr. Parell is board certified in Otolaryngology and board certified in Facial Plastic Surgery.

Q: Doctor, can you do my surgery with a laser?

A: Usually, the answer is no.

There are only two methods of cutting tissue- with a sharp instrument, like a scalpel, or with heat. Surgical instruments that create heat utilize a variety of energy sources. Each of these instruments produces electromagnetic energy. The only differ-

ence is the wavelength being used. Different wavelengths will penetrate tissue to different depths, be absorbed by different colors and create different levels of heat when the beam strikes tissue. Examples of these technologies include electricity, X ray, microwaves, radio waves, ultrasound, lasers, Cobalation and the Harmonic Scalpel.

Heat can be a good tool because it welds smaller blood vessels, reducing blood loss. The laser is the most widely used of the heat technologies. It is particularly helpful in facial skin resurfacing, removing birthmarks, tattoos and in reaching areas inaccessible to sharp instruments. Endoscopic and some microscopic surgery often involve lasers. However, in my specialty, head and neck surgery, the majority of procedures are most effective when a scalpel or scissors is used. Heat from lasers, or any electromagnetic energy source, can spread beyond the intended area, damaging nearby tissue. This can slow down healing, increase pain and cause more scarring. Technology is advancing, but not all surgeries are best performed using these methods.

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