

A close-up, high-resolution portrait of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes and nose. She has striking blue eyes and a neutral expression. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the texture of her skin and the intensity of her gaze.

# I CAN SEE *CLEARLY* NOW...

*Severely short-sighted for more than 20 years, Sarah Gooding, 32, finally took the plunge and had laser eye surgery. Here, she describes what it was like to see the world in sharp focus for the first time*

It has been five weeks and three days since I underwent laser surgery – and after 20 years of blurred vision, I'm still waiting for the novelty to fade. Every morning, I open my eyes and marvel at the fine spidery detail of the leaves on the apple tree outside my bedroom window.

I was 10 years old when I was fitted for my first pair of glasses. I'd been struggling to read the blackboard at school and my mother had taken me to the optician, "just as a precautionary measure". I clearly remember the moment the optician clapped his hands together, declaring, "Right then, pop next door and start looking at some frames – I'll be with you in a minute." My eyes filled with tears. Cool kids just didn't wear glasses.

In fact, I was diagnosed as severely short-sighted (minus eight, with astigmatism – where the cornea is an irregular shape – in both eyes). Even so, I shunned my spectacles whenever possible. Salvation came in the form of contact lenses just before my 13th birthday. But they were not without their problems. At 17, I had my first (and last) sunbed. Having popped my lenses out for my session, I put them back in again – lubing them up with the pot of water on the table. Except it wasn't water. It was bleach! I ran from the shop screaming, tears pouring down my face, while my mother raced me to A&E, where I was told I'd burned the surface off my cornea.

But the idea of laser surgery terrified me. It wasn't the procedure itself, but the fear of something going wrong. Nevertheless, I kept scouring laser eye surgery websites, checking the latest levels of testing on offer. I spoke to my father and brother (both surgeons) who advised me to look for a clinic with well-qualified surgeons, offering a high level of individual patient testing before they would proceed. I settled on the London Vision Clinic and made an appointment.

First, I was tested for suitability for laser surgery, which included everything from my current prescription to the size of my pupils in different light conditions. Then the curvature of my cornea was assessed in 3D, as it's vital that the thickness of the cornea is sufficient to withstand surgery. Finally, they tested my tear production (those with dry eyes are often not suitable for surgery).

When I was finally told that I was suitable for a procedure known as LASIK (laser in situ keratomileusis), I was delighted. The operation would involve the surgeon using one type of laser, a femtosecond microkeratome, to create a thin flap of corneal tissue (hence the need for corneas

of adequate thickness). The flap would be turned back on itself before a state-of-the-art laser sculpted the exposed bed of corneal tissue to rectify my sight. Within hours, the surface of the cornea would begin to grow back over the cut edge to seal the flap. And within seconds of the procedure being completed, I'd be able to see much better.

But what of the risks? The chances of being blinded as a result of laser eye surgery are roughly one in five million. The odds of something going slightly but 'noticeably wrong' is around one in 1,000. This struck me as being rather high – until I discovered that the chance of an expert surgeon facing a situation that they couldn't rectify, or improve, is about one in 30,000.

Armed with these odds, I didn't need to think too long about going ahead. The price might be steep (around £4,500), but what value would anyone put on their sight? I had just one final concern. Friends who had undergone surgery complained of difficulty seeing at night: headlights assumed slight halos and their sensitivity to brightness was increased. Reassured that, even if this did happen, it would settle down in time, I judged it a small price to pay for 20/20 vision – and signed on the dotted line...

I was told to stop wearing my gas permeable lenses, as their rigid form changes the shape of the cornea after long-term use. Instead, I had to wear soft contacts for two months, followed by a week of wearing glasses, to allow the corneas to go back to their natural shape.

Returning to the clinic, I took my glasses off for the very last time before anaesthetic drops were slipped into my eyes and, moments later, I was guided into the treatment room. As I lay on the couch, my consultant, Professor Reinstein, gently opened my left eye with a pair of eye-wideners, while taping down my right one. It was the moment I'd been dreading. But I had nothing to fear. As the laser

created the flap, I lay as still as possible, focusing on the green light above me during the whole process. The sensation was unusual, but not painful. I was aware of the corneal flap being turned back, only because, for a few seconds, my sight was totally blurred. Professor Reinstein continued talking to me, "Nearly there," he said. And then it was done. In just 20 minutes.

I slowly opened my eyes. At first it was

as though I were in a steam room – everything seemed cloudy. But I soon realised that I could read the notice on the wall and started yelping! I was then asked to read a line on the eye chart, and could even see the little note beside it: "20/20 vision". I had perfect sight.

I left the clinic armed with lubricating drops, to be inserted into both eyes every 15 minutes, and painkillers. I was also given a sleeping pill.

About an hour later, the pain started to kick in as the anaesthetic wore off. I'd been told to keep my eyes closed as much as possible, but at one point the pain was so intense I could hardly open them to insert the drops – and I was very grateful for the painkillers. Thankfully, things began to improve that evening and I could keep my eyes open for longer periods. I couldn't read or watch television, as these would discourage me from blinking, which would result in my eyes drying out.

Waking up the following morning was incredible – as though I were seeing everything in technicolour for the first time in my life. Returning to see my

consultant the next day, he checked my sight again – and was delighted to discover that I was easily able to read the 20/20 vision line on the chart. The operation was a complete success. And, at last, I could throw away my glasses, lenses and lens solutions. I now have better vision than the sight required of a fighter pilot!\* **SHE**  
• Visit [londonvisionclinic.com](http://londonvisionclinic.com); 0800 587 4705.

**"I REALISED I COULD READ THE NOTICE ON THE WALL AND STARTED YELPING!"**

