



Before the procedure patients undergo an extensive screening process

### IMAGINE THE BENEFITS

Both options are really only a 'make do' when it comes to diving. They are not ideal and so people are increasingly turning to refractive laser eye surgery to fix their vision problems. If you take part in any watersports and suffer from poor eyesight, the benefits are enormous. As I dive regularly and enjoy other watersports, the chance to have laser eye surgery with the London Vision Clinic was an opportunity I grabbed with both hands, despite an initial apprehension over what exactly was involved. Speaking to other people who had experienced having their eyes 'zapped' convinced me to go for it. Any worries about what the operation might entail were far outweighed by what having perfect eyesight for the first time in about ten years could mean to me. There was no turning back now.

Refractive laser procedures work by adjusting the curvature of the cornea at the front of the eye. This enables light to focus at a single point on the retina at the back of the eye, which in turn produces clearer, sharper vision.

More than 100,000 people in the UK undergo laser eye surgery every year,

but not everyone is a suitable candidate. London Vision Clinic offers a free initial screening to determine if you can be treated. Conditions that might rule out laser surgery as an option include diabetes, glaucoma, dry eye and arthritis. I was pretty confident I would be given the all-clear, but it was still a relief when the initial screening

confirmed it. The consultation is quite extensive, and you complete similar tests to a standard routine eye examination, there's just many more to carry out. If you find you're eligible for surgery, there's just one more visit to the clinic for an ophthalmic examination and further tests before the big day itself.

# Eyes wide open...

**A**s divers, our eyesight is something we rely on every time we take a breath in the underwater world. Good eyesight is something taken for granted if you're lucky enough to have perfect vision, but for those who have to wear glasses or contact lenses, it presents a problem when you come to dive.

For obvious reasons, wearing glasses under a mask is out of the question, so many divers opt for a prescription mask. These have their own drawbacks, as well as being more expensive than a standard mask in the first place. A broken mask strap can leave you unable to dive if you don't have a back-up, as a normal mask would be useless. If you're diving from a day boat or RIB, there's always the period between surfacing when you take off your mask to putting your glasses on back on the boat where



For contact lenses wearer Martin Bruce, the opportunity to obtain perfect vision via laser eye surgery was the chance of a lifetime. Here he reports on having the procedure.

Text by **Martin Bruce** Photographs by **Darren Russell**

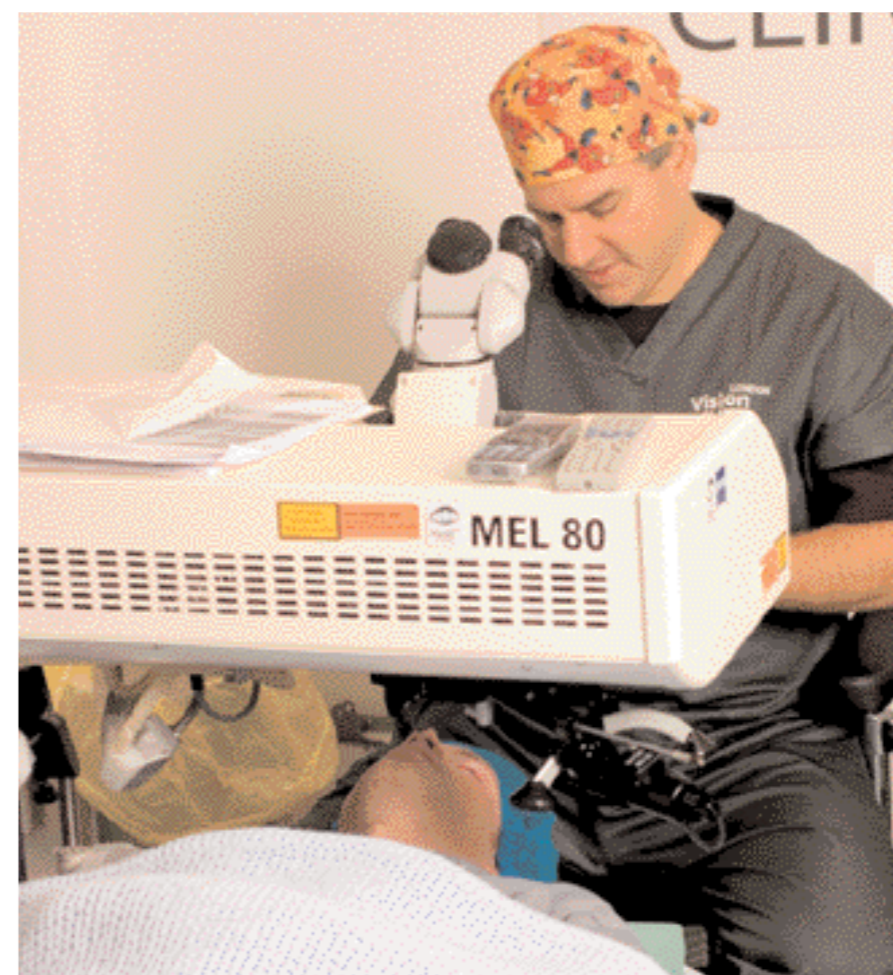
you're fumbling around half-blind.

Prescription masks have an advantage over contact lenses in that you're able to safely clear your mask underwater without the risk of losing a lens or getting an eye infection. Water can draw the moisture out of a contact lens, which can scratch the surface of the eye, causing infection and damage to the eye.

As a contact lens wearer for the last eight years, I always considered wearing lenses in the water was the best option.

My short sight was a fairly moderate -3 in each eye, too bad to be able to drive or watch TV without my lenses, and definitely no use for diving. Fish, what fish?

I had always been conscious of water getting in my mask during a dive, and I tried not to think about the chance my mask could be knocked off. When I trained, I had to close my eyes during mask removal drills, but I knew I would have to open them underwater if a problem ever arose.



Professor Reinstein helps to take away anxiety by reassuring patients at every stage

**The moment I opened my eyes for the first time and could read signs on the other side of the room is unforgettable**

I had mixed feelings on the day of surgery, but my nervousness was outweighed by the thought I would be returning home in a matter of hours with perfect eyesight! Your time in the clinic is brief – only two or three hours and you're ready to go home – while the procedure itself is remarkable and over in a matter of minutes. I had read all about the procedure so knew roughly what to expect, but I wanted to know what was going to happen in fine detail. All my surgeon, Professor Dan Reinstein, would tell me is that there was nothing to worry about and he would explain everything as we went along. So, I won't reveal too much, but I will say that the procedure is brief and painless, if a little uncomfortable. The moment when I opened my eyes for the first time and could read signs on the other side of



The surgery is over in minutes and the results are instant, what a relief!

the room is unforgettable. For the first half an hour, my sight was blurred – like having water in the eye – but I could still sense an improvement in my vision. After half an hour, the blurring had subsided and I was able to look around comfortably. The aftercare treatment of antibiotic eye drops was explained to me – you have to follow this regime to the letter – and then I was allowed home. It really is that simple – incredible. For the first few hours you have to take it easy and keep the eyes closed as much as possible to rest them, but the following day I could pretty much do things normally, like watch TV and read.

Writing now just over a week after the operation, it's easy to slip back into a normal routine. You stop taking the regular eye drops and wearing eye shields at night seven days after the surgery, and only have to add drops to help lubricate the eyes. I can work at a computer, drive

and basically go about daily life as if nothing had happened. Best of all, I have the all-clear to dive! Of course, housework is out of the question for a few months yet. It's the dust you know...

I think the stronger your prescription is for glasses or contact lenses, the more you gain from laser surgery as a strong prescription can get equally stunning results to a moderate prescription. Professor Reinstein's results at the London Vision Clinic speak for themselves. For short-sighted patients with a prescription up to  $-9.4$ , 100 per cent have achieved 20/30 vision – which is better than driving standard – and 92 per cent have achieved the magic 20/20 mark. A small proportion of patients achieve even better results! Professor Reinstein is a world-renowned expert in the field of laser surgery and has performed more than 8,000 procedures. London Vision Clinic has the most accurate tool to

**I can drive, use a computer, and go about daily life as if nothing happened. Best of all, I have the all-clear to dive**

screen for laser vision correction in the world. Results, safety, experience and technology count when considering taking such an important step.

I can only imagine the impact of opening your eyes for the first time following surgery if you previously had a strong prescription. I don't think it would be exaggerating to call it a life-changing moment for those people. Professor Reinstein showed me a mask that belonged to a diver with a  $-12$  prescription. Needless to say, his sight was restored perfectly. It certainly put my case into perspective.

Looking back over a six-week period from initial screening to having the surgery done, I'm almost surprised by how painless the whole experience was. I was at first a bit apprehensive about what was going to happen. No matter how safe it seems, you can't help but think 'what if something went wrong'. My eyes weren't perfect but I was still kind of fond of them. Thankfully the treatment I received by the staff at London Vision Clinic immediately set my mind at rest from the initial screening stage. The information and advice given to me allayed any fears, but I think the telling factor was the results that Professor Reinstein is able to obtain. I knew I was in safe hands. Thanks to Professor Reinstein and his team, I have achieved perfect eyesight – and for that I'll forever be grateful. ■

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