

## HEALTH INVESTIGATION #2

# SEEING IS BELIEVING

How GQ's **Paul Henderson** (inset, left) opened his eyes to the life-changing experience of laser surgery at the London Vision Clinic



In 1999, Tiger Woods was named Athlete of the Year, winning eight PGA tournaments and earning £3.3m in the process. But he wasn't happy. Why? Because although the greatest

golfer of the modern age had improved his swing and fine-tuned his putting, there was one important element to his game that he couldn't improve: his eyes.

Having worn contact lenses to combat his extreme near-sightedness, Tiger was frustrated that both the wind and rain continued to affect his vision, so he took the decision to have LASIK (laser in situ keratomileusis) surgery. "I was apprehensive, just like anyone else would be when their vision is going to be altered," says Woods, "but I was prepared, I researched everything, and I had a lot of faith in the surgeon."

Nearly ten years on, and despite the advances in laser eye technology, and the fact that it's now safe enough to be available on the NHS, in the UK especially it is still regarded with suspicion. Last year, only around 100,000 LASIK procedures were carried out here. At the London Vision Clinic, eye surgeon Mr Glenn Carp (above, right) understands the anxiety. "It's natural to be concerned about having one's eyes treated," says Carp, "but in the right hands it's a very safe procedure that offers an extraordinary improvement in the quality of life."

Carp speaks from personal – as well as professional – experience, having had the treatment himself last year at the hands of Professor Dan Reinstein, but his emphasis is on informing the patient about what is involved. With the most comprehensive pre-op testing in the world, more than three hours' worth, the Clinic will answer any query you can think of, and carries out numerous tests to check your suitability.

So rigorous is it in its tests that Professor Reinstein (one of the UK's leading laser eye surgeons) has even developed his own machine that measures the thickness of the

### FOUR STAGES OF LASIK SURGERY



cornea. "I developed this machine for a vast number of indications, but one of them is for a condition that affects about one in 20,000 cases," Reinstein explains. "No one else in the world relies on this test, but I want to rule out every eventuality. I would rather be the pilot who never crashes than the one who takes the plane down once or twice."

As GQ's Health & Sports Editor, that was exactly the kind of pilot I wanted. Having worn glasses and contact lenses for more than 20 years and suffered with astigmatism, I know what it's like to ride a bike in the rain and play golf in a gale, and not always be able to see the results. I wanted laser surgery for all those reasons (rather than mere vanity), but I was also reluctant to experience infection, damage, haemorrhage or surgeon error. But that is the

reality of laser treatment, although you can cut down on the risks by going with a reputable clinic and by choosing the best surgeons. Which is why I went with the London Vision Clinic...

So what is the operation like? After all the eye tests and consultations, the operation itself takes less than 20 minutes. Firstly, after anaesthetic drops are applied to the eyes, you lie down in the operating room and you are carefully placed under the laser machine. One eye is kept shut simply using

tape while the other is held open with a small eyelid holder and then Mr Carp lowers the laser coupling lens into position and creates a small flap in the cornea (there is no Goldfinger-style laser beam). It is painless, although there is some mild pressure for a few seconds. The procedure is then repeated on the other eye. Once the flaps are formed, you are placed under a laser and Mr Carp peels back each flap and shapes the cornea to correct the glasses prescription.

And that's it. You have to apply antibiotic drops and artificial tears to your eyes for about a fortnight, and they are sensitive to light, but apart from a slight scratchy feel as the flap heals over the first few hours, you can get on with life. The next day I was back at the clinic and my vision was better than it was with glasses and better than the requirements for being a fighter pilot.

Laser surgery is without doubt a life-changing experience that I would wholeheartedly recommend, but with the proviso that you go into it with your eyes open! Research your clinic and your surgeon and go for the best. And I'll see you on the golf course... I certainly won't be playing like Tiger, but I'll be the one without glasses. LASIK surgery at the London Vision Clinic costs approximately £4,600. 8 Devonshire Place, London W1. 0800 587 4705, [www.londonvisionclinic.com](http://www.londonvisionclinic.com)

### DON'T GO WITH AN EYE SURGERY CLINIC UNLESS...

1. It has had at least three months' formal training in laser surgery, and has done a minimum of 100 supervised and professional procedures.

2. It provides: a) a dilated pupil exam; b) dry eye evaluation; c) contrast sensitivity testing; d) infrared pupil-size measurement; e) front and back surface corneal topography; f) ultrasound pachymetry to measure corneal thickness; g) wavefront analysis.

3. It continually monitors its success rate and can provide you with a table of results.

4. It performs at least 500 refractive procedures per year.

5. Finally... ask if it's ever had a claim against it for malpractice in refractive surgery (and if it has been successful, or settled out of court).