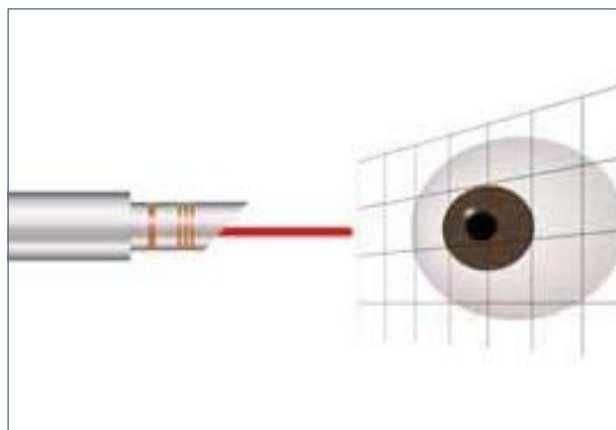


# SECOND SIGHT

## CHUCK OUT THOSE CONTACT LENSES IN FAVOUR OF LASER EYE SURGERY

From Men's Health · 14/04/2008

**Professor Dan Reinstein**, jazz saxophonist and the best laser eye surgeon in the world, beams playfully, fiddles with his computer and shouts the world 'bollocks!'.



That's 'bollocks!' as in:

"Anyone who says, 'oh, I think my glasses kinda suit me'? Bollocks!"

"Anyone who says 'I like wearing glasses'? Bullshit!"

"Who wants to wear contact lenses? No one!"

I nod in agreement, which comes easily, because my own spectacles are sitting in a clear, funnel-shaped vase in Prof Reinstein's waiting room. I don't need them any more. A label on the vase says that they're being sent off to a needy corner of the developing world as part of the Vision Aid Overseas recycling programme.

My conscience feels good: my eyes feel even better. Reinstein has given me 20:16 vision. I used to be half-blind, helpless, and incapable of navigating public transport without my specs. I spent a number of turbulent years at school with a pair of ugly frames that covered half my face. And now I have 20:16 – fighter pilot sight – better than 20:20 and not far off the human limit of 20:12, an acuity of vision that allows you to see through walls, diagnose internal medical problems, and [possibly] shoot jets of righteous fire from your irises.

What's more, this did not hurt, nor did it involve needles, scalpels, hospitals, chloroform, hacksaws, stethoscopes, bedpans, severe nurses, ashen-faced doctors, ECGs, ambulances, or any of the medical paraphernalia one might reasonably associate with burning both of your eyes with a large and terrifying laser. In fact, surgery consisted of 10 minutes of minor discomfort, followed by three hours recovery in the dark, drops in my eyes for a week or so... and that's it.

Here's what happened. I had around six hours of thorough pre-operative examinations. The extremely helpful staff at the London Vision Clinic mapped my eyes and tested my sight until they know more about my eyes than I thought possible, and certainly more than the regular optician who used to take 10 minutes a year to point me first towards the big 'A' and then towards the designer frames shelf.

On the day of surgery, my eyes were anaesthetised with drops, and a tiny flap was cut in the surface of my cornea. (Bear with me, this actually sounds more unpleasant than it was). Reinstein, with all the easy genius of a miniature artist, peeled the flap back, and used a laser beam to remould my cornea, curing within 10 seconds per eye my short sight and astigmatism.

During the entire procedure I couldn't feel a thing, and though I have trouble sitting through an episode of Casualty, everything was so wonderfully well explained that I felt not a pang of squeamishness

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during any point in the procedure. The only thing that bothered me was a slight smell of burning hair while the laser did its work. I went home and sat in the dark for a few hours – the next day I was back in the office with nothing more telling than slightly bloodshot eyes.

Laser eye surgery is now widely available. You've seen the ads. Listen to washed-up triple-jumping Bible basher Jonathan Edwards: you can get it on the high street. Today! Interest free! And so on. Even at Reinstein's London Vision Clinic, somewhere rather far from the high street and not too far from Harley Street, London's expensive-but-brilliant medical boulevard, prices are only about £2,000 per eye. (And before you choke on your cornflakes, remember that a new car loses double that the second you drive it off the forecourt). Tot up how much you'll spend on glasses or contacts over the next 20 years. You almost certainly can afford it.

Under the right watch, nearly everyone is a candidate. The average practice should consider 85%-90% of potential candidates suitable for surgery. Reinstein, who's a lot better than average and can operate successfully on freaks like me with deep-set eyes and bigger pupils than 99.9997% of the rest of the population (big pupils heighten the risk of getting starbursts, haloes and scattered night vision in the hands of an inexperienced surgeon), only turns away one person in 20. You are almost certainly a candidate.

So why don't more people have it done? Two words: yellow funk. Laser surgery got a bad rep in the early years of this decade, with scares over the regulation and long-term safety of a procedure little more than 20 years old. Both fears linger, the latter unreasonably, according to Prof Reinstein.

The profession is also becoming better and better regulated, with the Royal College of Optometrists now teaching and examining laser surgery – “in five years time the UK will be the best place in the world to have this kind of surgery,” says Reinstein. Right now, if you want to check out the credentials of your surgery or surgeon, you can download an exhaustive list of questions to ask them, together with the correct answers at [www.londonvisionclinic.com](http://www.londonvisionclinic.com).

What's left, then? If you really think about it, it's not money. It sure ain't time. And it's not safety – if you do your homework and go somewhere where they'll answer your probing questions about your surgeon's record and give you the stellar aftercare you should unfailingly expect (we're talking regular check-ups, direct contact with your surgeon before and after the operation, an expectation that they'll know what to do in the case of complications – aftercare is the most important thing in eye surgery, and what the London Vision Clinic specialises in, taking on difficult patients who have confounded the best surgeons in the world). What then?

“Fear,” says Reinstein. “We're operating on healthy eyes that may be blurry, but can already see.” In other words, you're gambling with your sight. “That fear is justified, because of course, there is a risk that you'll end up able to see less, even with glasses, than you could to begin with” says Reinstein. But with eye surgery, in the right hands, that risk is so small as to be virtually non-existent. Again, you can check out the stats at [www.londonvisionclinic.com](http://www.londonvisionclinic.com). And anyway, as Reinstein says: “There's a risk attached to everything. 1 in 11,000 deaths is caused by electrocution in the bathtub. I bet you never worry about that.”

Strangely, ever since he told me that, I haven't taken a bath. But that's mainly because I can now see my disgusting wrinkled feet poking out by the hot tap in all their repulsive clarity. Still, I'll take that.

[www.londonvisionclinic.com](http://www.londonvisionclinic.com)