

New hope for the blind

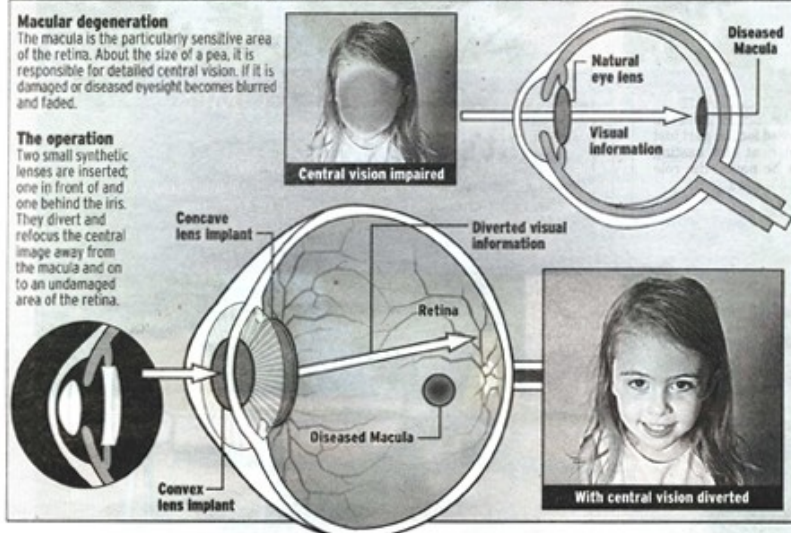
How to see things clearly again

Macular degeneration

The macula is the particularly sensitive area of the retina. About the size of a pea, it is responsible for detailed central vision. If it is damaged or diseased eyesight becomes blurred and faded.

The operation

Two small synthetic lenses are inserted, one in front of and one behind the iris. They divert and refocus the central image away from the macula and on to an undamaged area of the retina.



Pioneering surgery overcomes the most common cause of sight loss

SCIENTISTS have developed a telescopic lens implant which could restore vision loss for millions of Britons.

The pioneering treatment is being hailed as a major breakthrough in overcoming the most common causes of blindness in over 55-year-olds.

Patients will have to pay £5,995 for surgery involving two tiny lenses in the eye which magnify an image while diverting light flow away from the damaged part of the retina to sharpen vision.

But it is hoped the procedure – a breakthrough in the treatment of macular degeneration which can lead to devastating visual loss and blindness – will be available to the NHS in coming years.

Mr Shafiq Rehman, Yorkshire Eye Hospital's consultant ophthalmologist, one of the specialists carrying out the procedure, said: "This is very exciting and a huge advancement for people with poor vision. We are delighted to be able to offer this pioneering implant which can

By Lucy Johnston
HEALTH EDITOR

restore vision in those for whom, up until now there has been no effective treatment."

Roz Jowett, a 57-year-old mother of four, from Halifax, West Yorkshire, was one of the first people to benefit.

The self-employed saleswoman, born with myopic macular degeneration, had been losing her eyesight and her condition had reached a point where she could no longer go out alone at night, drive or recognise faces across a room. The operations in both eyes, carried out earlier this year, have brought back her quality of life. She said she could now see better than she has for most of her life.

Gerald Morris, 70, a retired mechanical engineer and keen golfer, was diagnosed with macular degeneration 10 years ago but his vision problems became significantly worse last year.

The father of two and grandfather of three from Holmfirth, West Yorkshire

said: "It was very embarrassing. In a public place people would come up to talk to me and I wouldn't recognise them because I could only see shapes of faces. I could read with a magnifying glass and sometimes it was impossible to focus."

The operations have restored his vision to almost normal. Gerald has been amazed by the results of his treatment. He has been able to



AMAZED: Gerald Morris resume golf and watch television again.

"I'm so happy," he said. "The biggest things are being able to drive again which has given me back my independence. It was also amazing to see the faces of my three grandchildren."

While the treatment cannot cure damage that has already been done it can allow the eye to maximise its potential.

The surgery is not yet available on the NHS but Mr Rehman said: "It would be wrong not to provide it on the NHS."

"I think we will be approaching the primary care trusts about it."