

A contact lens INSIDE my eye has given me perfect vision

By [Carol Davis](#)
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About one in three Britons suffers from both long-sightedness and astigmatism. Thick glasses used to be the only treatment, but Dr Ibrahim Khan, 28, from North-West London, an adviser on public health, was the first patient in Britain to be given a new kind of lens to treat both conditions, as he tells CAROL DAVIS.

THE PATIENT

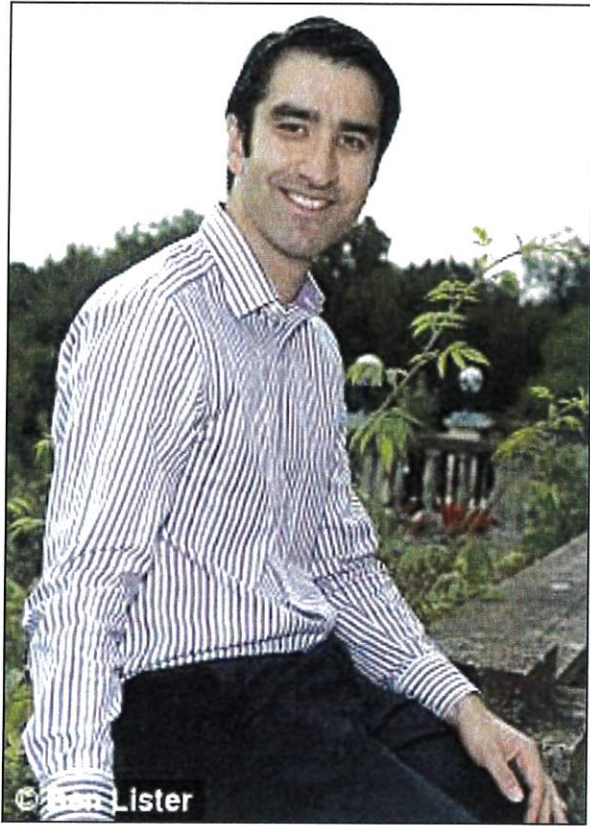
Since I was four I've needed glasses. I've always hated them, they were such a nuisance, and as a child I'd tear them off and break them, even though I couldn't see clearly without them. Eye specialists told my parents that I was long-sighted, so instead of light rays being focused on my retina, the tissue at the back of the eye, the image was falling behind it, making it difficult to see things up close.

I also had astigmatism in both eyes — this is where the cornea, the transparent front part of the eye, is an irregular shape, so light rays cannot focus properly on the retina, meaning my sight was blurred all the time.

My glasses dominated my life all through school, but without my glasses I couldn't even look at a book, or watch TV. Playing sport was hard, too, because without them I couldn't see to swim or run.

I couldn't bear to touch my eyes, so contact lenses weren't an option then. At 19, I asked about laser eye surgery, but my specialist explained it wouldn't work long-sightedness is caused by the eye being too short, and shortening it further using a laser wouldn't help.

I finally tried contact lenses, but my eyes were just too sensitive and wearing them was unbearable. So I was stuck with those unsightly glasses — I couldn't even buy trendy sunglasses because they had to be prescription.



Crystal clear: Dr Ibrahim Khan has ditched his thick glasses

But four years ago my aunt, who'd always worn glasses, had a new lens implanted in her eyes that meant suddenly she didn't need glasses.

I scoured the internet and read about implantable contact lenses to correct poor vision. They were just starting to arrive in Britain.

In April I saw [Dr Goran Helgason](#), who was using the new implants. He tested my eyes, and told me he could implant the special contact lens for my blurring but since my cornea was so irregular I'd still need laser surgery to give me the best vision (this wouldn't help with the long-sightedness, though).

I couldn't face something that would alter my eyes irreversibly. Eyes are just too precious.

But then [Dr Helgason](#) said if I could wait a few months, a brand new sophisticated implantable contact lens would be available which would treat both the astigmatism as well as long-sightedness. This new lens would be custom-made to correct my specific vision problems, using my doctor's detailed measurements — and I wouldn't need laser surgery. It sounded incredible, so I jumped at the chance.

In August, Dr Helgason implanted the first lens in my weaker left eye. My eyelid was clamped back, and a bright light shone in my eye so I couldn't see a thing, though I felt the slight tug of the incision.

Ten minutes later, I walked out of the clinic. I'd had my pupil dilated for the operation and the light hurt my eye, so I wore sunglasses for the first day. But the next day, when my pupil had returned to its normal size, I could see with my left eye just as well as if I'd been wearing my thick glasses. It was amazing to be able to use my left eye properly for the first time in my life.

When I had the right eye done a few weeks later, I couldn't bear to open my eyes at first in case it hadn't worked. But I could read every tiny detail on the monitor screen, and see clearly right across the room, too. I was ecstatic.

Now I can run and swim without worrying, see the clock when I wake up in the morning and see clearly in the rain without feeling like I need windscreen wipers.

I've kept those glasses as a souvenir. It's incredible to know I don't need them any more.

THE SURGEON

Dr Goran Helgason, consultant eye surgeon at Advanced Vision Care in London, says:

For about one in ten of those with long-sightedness and astigmatism, the conditions are so severe that they need thick glasses or sometimes contact lenses all their life. This complicated combination is very hard to treat and there's a higher chance that treatment will fail.

Laser surgery is less effective because the eye is already too short. We can try reshaping the edges of the cornea so it directs light rays towards the retina more accurately, but this works only for patients with mild long-sightedness. Over the past four years, we have also been able to implant

flexible miniature contact lenses actually in the eye, in the space behind the iris and in front of the eye's own lens, to correct problems with vision. But, again, these lenses are made only for short-sightedness.

So for long-sighted patients, especially those with severe long-sightedness combined with astigmatism, there was very little we could do, except offer thick glasses.

But the new Toric Hyperopic implantable contact lens is made specially for each individual eye to correct the patient's specific problems with long-sightedness and astigmatism. This is very exciting and means that for the first time, we can help these desperate patients.

The operation takes about ten minutes, once the patient's pupil is dilated. Working under a microscope, I make a 3mm incision where the cornea joins the white of the eye — the special lens is folded up, injected and unfurls in the space in front of the lens.

I manoeuvre it into position; then that's it, the tiny incision will close naturally

Recovery is usually fast and painless, so people can go to work and drive after only one day.

This implantable lens could work for most long-sighted patients, as long as there is enough space in front of their own lens, and is fantastic for patients such as Ibrahim, who should never need glasses for long-sightedness or astigmatism again.

The operation costs from £3,150 per eye privately — it is not available on the NHS. www.advancedvisioncare.co.uk; tel: 020 7935 7497.

