



Broccoli Apparently the England rugby team will be tucking into this iron-packed veg for breakfast today. Yarr!

Standing tall A Danish study has shown that taller people are happier and healthier than shorter. The reason? Short people moan more about their health - and presumably the view.

Daily sex for healthy sperm Scientists have revealed that regular romps could help men with low sperm quality to boost their twimmers, and chances of fatherhood.

Guilt-free fish fingers Young's launched the UK's first 100% sustainable, line-caught, cod fish fingers.

HOT OR NOT

Politicians over 60 Against comments have claimed the scalp of Sir Meriel Campbell, 66, now the ex Lib Dem leader.

Cycling It's a jungle out there - figures have revealed that cyclists are four times more likely to be killed than pedestrians.

Freezing your fertility Experts have dismissed the prospect of career-women freezing their eggs to postpone motherhood, saying that there's not enough evidence to show it works.

That glass of wine when you get home Folks in the richest areas drink too much. Have a nice coppi instead.

ASK GREAT ORMOND STREET

The relationship between doctor and parent is an important one, but how do you know if you're getting the best from your child's GP? Dr Jane Collins has the answers, plus tips on coping with bullying at school, Tourette's syndrome, ME, depression, bed-wetting, acne, birthmarks and much, much more

timesonline.co.uk/childhealth

If you need help with a common childhood complaint, send an e-mail to djane@thetimes.co.uk

INSIDE STORY
BLENDED VISION SURGERY

A new sight for sore eyes

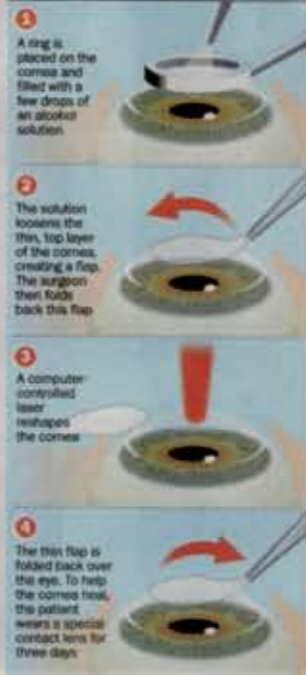
Presenter Paul Ross was able to ditch his specs after new laser treatment, says Celia Dodd

The first thing that the radio and TV presenter Paul Ross does when his alarm goes off is to reach for his specs, even though he doesn't need them any more. Ross, 50, used to be so short-sighted that he was classed as legally blind and for the past three years he has needed reading glasses for close work. Then last June he ditched his spectacles and contact lenses after ground-breaking new laser treatment gave him 20/20 vision for long distances and reading. He says: "I hadn't expected the treatment to be as life-changing as it was. When I came out of the operation I looked out of the surgery window on the second floor and I could read the car numberplates below. I don't usually get emotional, but I choked up a bit and gave the surgeon a big hug."

Ross lives in Buckinghamshire with his third wife and the eldest of his four daughters, Dolly, 16. From the age of 11 he just got on with the daily palaver of specs and then contact lenses. It seemed normal in a family he describes as the "four-eyed Waltons": his lorry driver father, younger sister and four younger brothers, including the chatshow host Jonathan, are short-sighted. It didn't stop their mother from getting the whole brood signed up with a model agency when Ross was 11, though.

"I thought I'd never get a snag" At secondary school in Leytonstone, East London, Ross's sight became progressively worse until his prescription was minus 9 (most short-sighted people wear about minus 6). Without glasses he was helpless. People and objects were mere blobs; he couldn't see bus numbers or even recognise close friends. Even so, he says: "I never wore my glasses outside the classroom. It wasn't because I got teased but more because you're unconfident enough as a teenager anyway. And I thought I'd never get a snag or a show dance in glasses. So I saved up for my first pair of contact lenses before I went to university." Ross originally considered having laser correc-

How Lasek works



tion surgery ten years ago but decided against it when he was told that he was so short-sighted he would still need contact lenses and that the procedure would involve cutting the cornea. He changed his mind after developing age-related farsightedness, or presbyopia, at 47. It's a condition that affects half the adult population and

Treatment by numbers
1 in 20 patients is unsuitable for the treatment because he/she cannot adapt to the imbalance in the eye
1 in 1,000 patients does not like blended vision, but the procedure is reversible
£995-£2,000 is the cost; from £995 per eye for non-customised treatments for single short sight, to between £1,400 and £2,000 per eye for customised treatments



DR COPPERFIELD
INSIDE THE MIND OF A GP

Don't try this at home...



Grit your teeth. Because I'm going to remind you of that recent gruesome story about someone pulling out his own gnashers. Apparently, he had problems getting NHS dental care, so took matters - or, at least, one particular molar - into his own hands.

We GPs should probably take some responsibility for this because, for years, we've been berating patients for turning up at our surgeries with toothache. Just because we're free, accessible and can spell "amoxicillin" doesn't mean that we're able or willing to play dentists.

So our receptionists are told to direct the swollen-gummed masses towards NHS Direct. Presumably the nurse on the other end of the line is also exasperated by these patients, or at least with the absence of any service to refer them to, which is why she's forced to say: "I'm afraid I can't tell you where to find an NHS dentist, but I do know where you can get a good pair of pliers."

I SPEND A LOT OF TIME SALVAGING BOTCHED JOBS

After all, in the current climate of "setting priorities" and "resource allocation" there are plenty of areas the NHS no longer covers. This probably means that we can expect medical have-a-go-heros to expand their repertoire. So I'm looking forward to headlines about patients who remove their tattoos with sand paper and perform home liposuction using the Dyson.

Not that such activities are particularly new. In fact, a GP hit the headlines a few years back because he performed a vasectomy on himself, which was an interesting way to get the DVY surgery ball rolling.

This raised many fascinating issues, not least exactly who he should sue if the procedure failed. But what the public overlooked in its subsequent rush to embrace "try-it-at-home surgery" was that he was medically qualified. And that many procedures are trickier than those in the board game. Operation and involve complications more serious than a buzzer going off.

But embrace it they did, to the extent that, according to reports, a woman with ME took a drill to her skull for a spot of rebraining. Why? Probably because BSQ was out of pliers. Oh, and because she had read somewhere that it might help, though having the energy to wield a power-tool that heavy for that long casts doubt on the original diagnosis. She lived to tell the tale.

Nonetheless, with waiting lists still a problem, and with the Department of Health keen to promote self-help, DIY surgery clearly has potential. And, given that orthopaedic surgeons are simply beer-swilling rugby players who dabble in prosthetics, I see no reason why you shouldn't have a go at doing, say, your own hip replacement, provided you've got a saw, an instruction booklet and a bad enough limp.

The less ambitious might like to stick to the simple stuff. There really is nothing to it. For example, I can talk you through draining a subungual haematoma (a bruise under the nail) right now. Slam car door on thumb. Scream. Straighten out paper clip. Heat tip until red-hot. Apply tip to nail over bruise. Watch as paperclip melts hole in nail.

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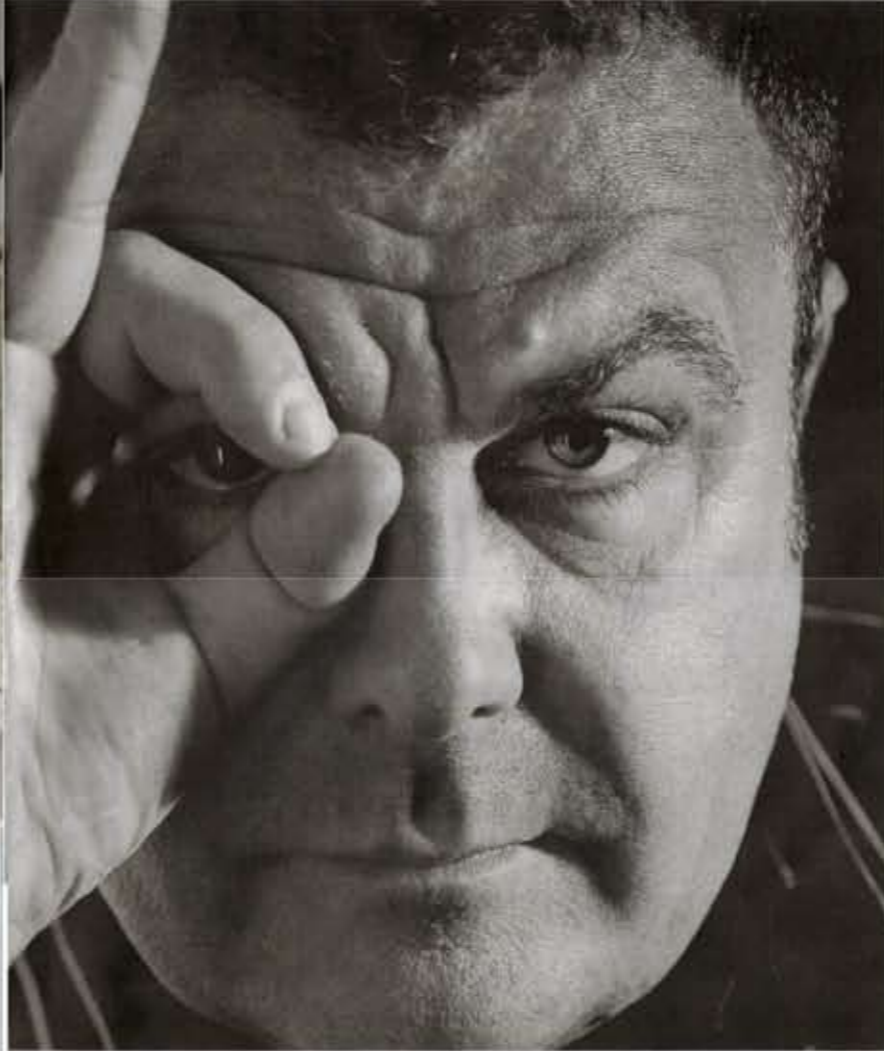
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Dr Copperfield is a GP in Essex and writes for www.DoctorPortal.co.uk



makes so many people over 45 reach for their reading glasses. For Ross, wearing thick varifocal glasses was the last straw. Despite his reputation as a bit of a ladies' man, I believe him when he says that it wasn't entirely about vanity.

"Glasses aren't good for television because they catch the lights," he says. "Contacts are a hassle too. I hated wearing them for night-time driving and I got serious eye infections when I was filming in the Amazon a few years ago."

Laser correction for reading vision has become available in the past five years through a technique called blended vision, the first treatment that can correct reading vision as well as distance vision problems, including severe short sight. Only one clinic in the UK, Focus Laser Vision, in Wimpole Street, Central London, is dedicated to providing the treatment.

Dr David Allambi, who is pioneering the procedure in this country, says: "The technique involves reshaping the cornea in each eye differently so that while both are multi-focal, one eye is weighted towards distance, the other towards reading. It's a bit like stereo speakers with different things on each channel but you get the full effect when they are joined together. In most cases the brain quickly adapts. Only about one person in 20 wouldn't get on with it because his or her brain won't adapt, so we do extensive

What is it?

Blended vision is the only technique that can correct reading vision and short sight. Two treatments are used: Lasek (laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis) and Lasek (laser-assisted subepithelial keratomileusis). Femtosecond lasers means reshaping the cornea, which acts as a lens. Lasek is used in 80 per cent of cases; Lasek is used in more extreme cases, such as in Paul Ross's. In both treatments the laser reshapes the cornea, making it more convex to give it greater focusing power. Reading vision improves within days, while distance sight can take 4-12 weeks. Contact focus@focus.co.uk, 0845 5000500

tests to make sure that patients are suitable." In Ross's case this involved wearing special contact lenses for a weekend. For others a few hours may be enough.

"I've been liberated from the hassle of specs" Ross underwent the procedure in June. He recalls: "The whole thing took about ten minutes, with the laser treatment about 15 seconds per eye. I felt a bit like Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange* with my eyes held open, but I'd had contact lenses for 32 years so I had no problem with people touching my eyeballs. The surgeon put in anaesthetic eye-drops, so it was painless although there was a smell of burning which I remember commenting on."

Two days after the operation his eyes were a bit sore and puffy. "I looked like I had a bad hangover. But I still did my Saturday morning radio show on LBC and by the Sunday the reaction had begun to subside." Four months on, Ross has recently come to the end of the strict aftercare regime, which involved using eye drops three times a day and wearing sunglasses, even when in the sun. "The whole thing has been a revelation. I accommodated the hassle of contacts and glasses for so long that it wasn't a hassle any more - until I was liberated from it. Suddenly I was free."