# Gene therapy offers hope of blindness cure

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Scientists at the University of Oxford have restored some vision to patients who were going blind by injecting a working gene into cells in their retinas.

The team hopes that their research will lead to cures for other common causes of blindness, including genetic-related macular degeneration, which affects thousands of people in Britain.

The six people in the Oxford trial had choroideremia, which is caused by a defect in the gene CHM. It affects about one in 50,000 people.

There is no cure or treatment for the disease, which progresses slowly, destroying retinal photoreceptors and often leading to complete blindness by middle age. Its slow pace offers a glimmer of hope by making it possible to step in with gene therapy before too much damage has been done.

Publishing their findings [in *The New England Journal of Medicine*](http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc1509501), the experts said that it was the strongest evidence to date that the effects of gene therapy could be permanent.

Robert MacLaren, who led the study, said: “As we learn more about genetics, we realise that correcting faulty genes even before a disease starts may be the most effective treatment.”

Joe Pepper, 24, a teacher from Croydon who had the gene therapy, said: “I will remember that day for the rest of my life. I could see more than before the operation. I could read four lines [on the eye test] beyond where I was earlier. I laughed and shed a tear.”