NEWS LESSON

A Virus, Some Goggles and a Glimpse of Light



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What everyday invention do you wish someone would improve?
2. What makes a science headline sound too good to be true?
3. Can a small improvement be life-changing?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**detect**	☐	A	to notice or find something that is hard to see
2	**gradually**	☐	B	puts two or more things together
3	**retina**	☐	C	slowly, a little at a time
4	**combines**	☐	D	important enough to matter
5	**meaningful**	☐	E	close-fitting glasses that cover the eyes
6	**prospect**	☐	F	a group of cells that forms part of the body
7	**goggles**	☐	G	the chance that something good may happen
8	**tissue**	☐	H	the part at the back of the eye that senses light

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Ten patients with advanced retinitis pigmentosa took part in the trial. Six showed a meaningful gain, though none of them could recognise a face.

1 Imagine being able to detect a doorway after years of seeing almost nothing. That may sound like a modest achievement, but for somebody with severe sight loss it could make a practical difference. Researchers have reported encouraging results from an experimental treatment that combines gene therapy with electronic goggles. The study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in October 2026, involved ten patients whose vision had been badly damaged by an inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa.

2 The disease gradually destroys the light-sensitive cells in the retina, the tissue at the back of the eye that detects light and helps create images. When the damage becomes advanced, restoring sight is extremely difficult. The new treatment finds an unusual way to get around the problem. Instead of repairing the cells that have already been lost, it aims to make other surviving cells respond to light.

3 Doctors injected a modified virus into one eye of each participant. It delivered genetic instructions for a light-sensitive protein, allowing certain nerve cells to react to carefully controlled signals. Patients then wore special goggles that converted camera images into pulses of light. The system did not recreate ordinary vision. Rather, it gave the surviving cells a way of sending a limited amount of visual information to the brain.

4 Six of the ten participants showed what researchers considered a clinically meaningful improvement in light sensitivity, while seven of the ten showed some increase. With the goggles, some were better able to locate objects and carry out simple tasks, such as finding a notebook or identifying the position of a door. There were limits, however. The participants could not recognise faces, and the system produced only a restricted form of visual information. Those who spent more time learning to use the goggles generally performed better.

5 Safety was the main purpose of the trial. Researchers recorded eye-related side effects, most of which were mild or moderate. One severe event occurred immediately after an injection, but it was treated and resolved within minutes. The study was also small and had no untreated comparison group. That makes it important not to exaggerate its results or suggest that the treatment is ready for general use.

6 Nevertheless, the research represents a meaningful step forward. Rather than depending on the exact genetic cause of the disease, the method targets nerve cells that may survive several different forms of retinal damage. Further work will be needed to improve the images, test more patients and narrow down who might benefit most. For people who have lost their sight, the prospect of detecting an object or moving more confidently through a familiar room offers hope. The challenge is to turn those early gains into reliable improvements in everyday life.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The treatment costs less than existing eye surgery. T F NG
2. Patients who practised more with the goggles generally performed better. T F NG
3. The study appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine. T F NG
4. The trial included an untreated comparison group. T F NG
5. More participants showed some increase in light sensitivity than showed a clinically meaningful one. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

exaggerate	familiar	mild	modified	resolved	restricted	severe	surviving

1. News reports should not _____ the results of a small early trial.
2. Access to the new treatment is _____ to people who join a clinical trial.
3. The flood destroyed most of the village, and the _____ houses were repaired later.
4. The doctor said the pain was _____ and that the patient needed hospital care at once.
5. The problem was _____ within minutes, and the test carried on.
6. Walking in a _____ room is easier than in a place you have never visited.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the study ended, six patients _____ a meaningful improvement. (SHOW)
2. Camera images _____ into pulses of light by the goggles. (CONVERT)
3. If the trial had included an untreated group, the researchers _____ the two groups. (COMPARE)
4. Immediately after an injection, a serious event _____ , but it was treated within minutes. (OCCUR)
5. The goggles allow patients _____ objects more easily. (LOCATE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Check what follows the gap: some of these verbs take an object, and some take a how-clause or another preposition.

across	behind	down	into	on	out	up

1. A larger study may help doctors narrow _____ the list of people who could benefit.
2. Researchers still have to work _____ how long the effect lasts.
3. The team hopes to turn these early gains _____ lasting benefits.
4. A good trial must follow _____ with patients to check for later side effects.
5. The size of the gain may depend _____ how long a patient practises.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. How should a headline explain a treatment that helps some people a little?
2. What should researchers explain before asking people to try a new treatment?
3. Which matters more in a science story: the breakthrough or what it changes in daily life?

9 Role-play: choosing a headline

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the editor
You edit a newsletter for a charity that supports people with sight loss. You want a short, exciting headline about a small trial. Ask the writer what the study really showed, then decide together.

Student B · the writer
You've read about a small trial. It helped some people find objects, but it isn't a cure. Explain why the headline must be honest, and suggest a version you both like.

Useful phrases

I'd like the headline to catch people's attention.
That's not quite accurate, though.
We shouldn't promise more than the study showed.
What if we say it's an early step?
I'm not sure that's fair to our readers.
Let's agree on a version we're both happy with.

Afterwards, tell the class: which headline did you choose, and why is it fair to readers?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 C · 3 H · 4 B · 5 D · 6 G · 7 E · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 NG · 2 T · 3 T · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 exaggerate · 2 restricted · 3 surviving · 4 severe · 5 resolved · 6 familiar

6 Verb forms

1 had shown · 2 are converted · 3 would have compared or could have compared · 4 occurred · 5 to locate

7 Language focus

1 down · 2 out · 3 into · 4 up · 5 on

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