Presbyopia and Reading Glasses

Normal healthy young eyes have a wide range of focus from far distance to a few centimetres. In a young eye, the lens is very flexible. As we get older, the lens of the eye thickens and slowly loses its flexibility leading to a gradual decline in our ability to focus on objects that are close up. This loss of focusing ability is called PRESBYOPIA. It is not a disease but a normal and expected change which sooner or later affects everyone, whether they already wear contact lenses and spectacles or not. It does not occur suddenly. Around the age of 40-45 we begin to realise that we are holding the newspaper further away or we need more light to read the telephone directory.

What should a person do?

Pay a visit to an optometrist. An eye examination, which takes between 20 and 30 minutes, should be part of a normal health care routine. Not only will the practitioner measure the focusing defects of people's eyes but will also check closely for any early signs of eye disease or other medical condition. Currently all eye examinations for patients aged 60 and over are free of charge. They are also free for those who receive certain benefits, or have certain medical conditions.

How is Presbyopia corrected?

The Dispensing Optician will advise on the wide range of options available to restore good vision. It is important that any hobbies or special tasks at work are mentioned. There is no advantage in delaying using reading spectacles they will not make eyes lazy.

Reading glasses:

The simplest form of lens - for correcting near vision - is worn for reading, sewing etc, but will probably make distance vision blurred.

This means that someone may have a pair of spectacles simply for reading but cannot use them to drive or watch TV. It will probably be necessary to keep removing them when speaking to colleagues at work, for example. However, there are several alternatives that solve this problem.

Half Eyes:

If someone has good distance vision, they might choose half eyes. These are shallow frames designed to enable a person to look over the top of the frame when distance vision is needed. However, this design is a disadvantage if the near task is above the top of the lens.

Bifocals:

These are special lenses which have a prescription for distance vision (if required) in the top half of the lens and a prescription for the near vision (reading) in the lower half.

Progressive or Varifocal Lenses:

Some people find the dividing line distracting or are concerned about the appearance of bifocal lenses. Progressive or Varifocal lenses (some people call them bifocals without lines) solve this. These lenses progress gradually from distance strength at the top to reading strength at the bottom, giving a range of focusing strength in between and are becoming very popular.

Occupational Lenses:

There are now a wide variety of lenses that are designed specifically for those who spend time working at intermediate and near vision. These are particularly good for computer users, or for certain hobby uses.

Anti-reflection lenses

Lens reflections can be a problem for spectacle wearers. There are four different types of reflection:

- Reflections on the front of the lens, seen by other people;
- Reflections from behind which are superimposed on the wearer's field of vision;

- Internal reflections caused by the lens thickness, particularly noticeable in high powered lenses;
- Reflections at the front surface of the eye.

All these reflections can reduce the amount of light reaching the eye by as much as 15%, which means both vision quality and contrast are impaired. There is a solution. By treating the lens with a special coating, reflections can be limited to less than 1% and the problems almost eliminated. Anti-reflection lenses give such a dramatic reduction of reflections, the benefits are significant.

- Clearer and sharper clarity of vision
- Closer to natural vision
- Improved driving vision - especially at night
- Less VDU glare

In short, everyone who wears spectacles will enjoy the overall improved visual comfort provided by anti-reflection coatings.

Contact lenses

For contact lens wearers, there are various ways a practitioner can help when near focus begins to blur. There are bifocal or multifocal contact lenses, or it is possible to wear glasses over contact lenses for reading.

When to visit a practitioner again

Between the ages of 40 and 65 your prescription is likely to change significantly. It is essential for this age group to have their eyes examined every two years, not only to review their prescription, but also to ensure their eyes are healthy.

Remember, apart from many other eye problems, the optometrist may also see general health problems such as high blood pressure or diabetes which, if caught early enough, can be effectively managed by a doctor.

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