

Reading Glasses or Presbyopia

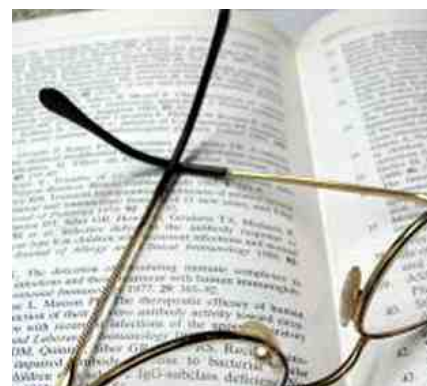
What does this mean: This term refers to the need to use reading glasses for close work such as reading, desk work, knitting, eating etc... This is a completely normal phenomena that virtually every person experiences. Typically this occurs between 45 and 50 years old.

What are the early symptoms?

Initially: Slowness in focusing such as from the Television to the newspaper.

Followed by: Holding the newspaper further away until ones arm is not long enough!

Finally: Unable to read small print such as the telephone directory and lastly reading any size print becomes impossible.



Does the age that people start to need reading glasses vary?:

Yes. This is more associated with whether you are short or long-sighted.

Those that are long-sighted and wear spectacles for the distance need reading glasses at an earlier age, whereas those that are short-sighted often manage to cope without reading glasses until a much older age. A few people whose prescription is of the order of -2 to -3 dioptres can manage without reading glasses entirely by taking off their distance spectacles to read with.

Why do I need reading glasses?: It is due to the lens of the eye becoming harder as one grows older. At birth the lens of the eye is like a liquid in a bag and is very pliable. Muscles of the eye change the shape of the lens to bring things into focus just like a camera lens. As the lens of the eye gets older it becomes much harder and by the age of about 46 the lens is of a "pastel" like consistency and one is no longer able to change the shape of the lens sufficiently to bring reading material into sharp focus. By the time one is 65 the lens of the eye has become like a "wine gum" and it is virtually impossible for the muscles of the eye to change the shape. The eye cannot then focus to things close to.

Is there anything I can do to prevent this?: No. People have tried the use of eye exercises to strengthen the muscles of the eye for focusing but these have not shown to have any significant benefit and it is not possible to cheat nature.

How can it be treated?: It is simply corrected with reading glasses. Your Optometrist or Ophthalmic Medical Practitioner will undertake an eye test for you and recommend the correct glasses. Unfortunately nothing is as easy as when you were able to use the muscles of the eye to change the focusing of the eye. Now it will be necessary to have a lens for distance and a lens for reading.

What type of lenses are available?:

Single Vision Lenses: These are full-frame reading glasses and are excellent if you are going to do an extensive amount of reading or your vision is poor for other causes. However when you look through the lenses into the distance everything will be blurred. For this reason most people choose one of the types below.

Bifocals: This lens has the upper part of the lens set for your distance prescriptions so you are able to see and walk about and a lower reading segment of various types to read with. In order to use these glasses it is necessary to look downwards through the lower segment of the reading segment. It is important that one moves the eyes and not the head but is something that most people get used to very quickly.

Varifocal Lenses: Bifocal lenses give excellent distance and close vision but nothing in between is in focus. Varifocal lenses have been designed to gradually increase the strength of the reading as you go down into the lower parts of the spectacle. This means that there is a part of the lens for all distances. Some describe it as giving them the type of vision back that they use to have. While many people are extremely happy with these types of lenses a few people are unable to use them. They are ideal for general use but not so good for extensive amounts of reading due to a smaller reading area. Should you not be comfortable with this type of lens then do discuss with your optician about changing the type of lens to a bifocal or single vision lens.

Zeiss and Hoya lenses come well recommended, wider range of vision

Off-the shelf-reading glasses: De-regulation of the sale of spectacles means that you can buy off-the-shelf reading glasses from many outlets. These are often very cheap but do look at the quality of the frame and the lenses which reflects their price. Lenses bought from the opticians will be centred correctly for near vision and can have anti-scratch coatings, anti-reflective coatings and can be made of very high quality plastic. Furthermore by undertaking an eye test you will ensure that the spectacles are prescribed to your individual needs, both for distance and near, as well of course as checking the health of the eye and screening for conditions such as glaucoma and cataracts. However your optometrist can advise you as to whether off-the-shelf reading glasses would be suitable for you.

Multi focal Contact lenses: Wearers of contact lenses may like to consider the bifocal or Multi-focal contact lenses. This is a very specialised area and requires careful discussion with your Optometrist/contact lens practitioner about the pro's and con's of using Multi-focal contact lenses.

Laser Surgery: Currently refractive surgery is unable to correct presbyopia. This type of surgery is only successful in correcting your distance vision. However if you are Hypermetropic ie needing say +3.00 lenses then laser will help as it will make your distance vision perfect, help the reading though weaker reading glasses will still be needed at times. Conversely Short sighted people, myopes, loose their ability to read after laser surgery though loose their glasses for distance a trade off that is probably for most myopes not worth it.

Will I need a change in spectacles?: The lens of the eye continues to grow and the ability to focus gradually reduces requiring an increase in the strength of the reading spectacles. Thus it is recommended that you have an eye test once every two years and your Optometrist will be able to advise whether any change in spectacles is required and will also serve to check the health of the eyes.

Should you require any more information please feel free to ask your Optometrist or Doctor.