

Presbyopia

The word 'presbyopia' is Greek for 'old eyes,' and, medically, refers to the gradual loss of the eye's ability to see things up close. Due to the need to hold anything that requires close-up vision farther away from the eyes in order to see it clearly, this condition is also called 'short arm syndrome.'

Most people first notice difficulty reading very fine print such as the phone book or the newspaper. While holding reading material further away helps for a while, eventually visual correction in the form of reading glasses, bifocals or contact lenses is needed for close work.

Causes

The natural effect of aging is the cause of presbyopia, which usually begins around age 40.

When you're young, the lens of your eye is soft and flexible. It contracts and relaxes to allow close-up and distance vision. It contracts and thickens to see something close and relaxes and flattens to see in the distance. As you age, your lenses lose the flexibility and ability to contract and relax as well as it once did.

Symptoms

The symptoms of presbyopia include difficulty seeing close work, especially with reading because print seems to have less contrast than in the past. In order to see clearly, reading material and small objects must be held further away. Brighter, more direct light is required to read or do small detailed work. Fatigue and eye strain frequently accompany reading or fine, detailed work.

Treatment

Presbyopia is detected with a comprehensive vision exam.

There is no cure for presbyopia, only treatments. Glasses and contact lenses are the traditional ways of correcting presbyopia. Glasses and contacts work by bending light before it enters your eyes in order to compensate for the loss of ability to relax or contract your eye muscles.

The treatment for presbyopia depends on the age, lifestyle, occupation and hobbies of the patient. The quality of distance vision is also a factor in deciding on the best method to treat the condition.



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Reading glasses are usually the best choice if you see well at a distance and need only close-up correction. If you need correction for both distance and close-up, you may choose bifocal or trifocal glasses, or separate glasses for reading and distance. Progressive lenses, which have a continuous, gradual change in correction from eye level to bottom of the lens, are also available.

Bifocal contacts are another option, as are monovision contacts, in which one eye is corrected for distance and the other for reading.

Monovision can also be accomplished with refractive surgery; however, monovision is not for everyone. Some patients do not adapt readily to having differing visual signals sent to the brain. Before considering surgery, we suggest you try monovision contacts to ensure that you're happy with this type of correction.

More recently, various surgical procedures for the correction of presbyopia have become popular. This can be done by surgery on the cornea, similar to LASIK, or by lens surgery, similar to a cataract removal, but with specialized implants. Some of these procedures allow patients to be free of all glasses for nearly all of their activities with good vision at both near and far.