

Many options for those who need reading glasses

It's a scene you might recognize from your own life, as well as from a television commercial that's been airing a lot lately.

A middle-aged couple are in a restaurant. The man holds his menu at arm's length. The woman passes him her feminine-looking reading glasses.

The man, looking slightly embarrassed, dons the reading glasses — but eventually tosses them to the waiter as the announcer proclaims, "Goodbye, readers."

This commercial is for Bausch & Lomb's multi-focal contact lenses, which have reading optics in the center of the lens, distance optics on the outer part and a graduated transition between.

"It's getting all the images, which sometimes takes a bit of an adjustment, but, for the most part, it's pretty quick and easy and your brain just starts to pay attention to whatever images you're meaning to focus on," says Chris Huels, contact lens senior product manager for Bausch & Lomb.

There certainly are a lot more options now than there were when our parents struggled with presbyopia — the official name for the condition that's remedied by reading glasses.

Nowadays there are, of course, a dizzying number of styles of reading glasses — from polka dots to plaids and costing anywhere from a



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few to several hundred dollars — and Web sites devoted just to them, like boomereyeware.com.

There are also, among other things, glasses with progressive lenses (or noline bifocals) — and several surgical options, including a brand new procedure under investigation called a corneal inlay, which

aims at improving reading vision without affecting distance vision.

"We have just begun a multicenter clinical trial of a corneal inlay in the U.S. and have just started recruiting patients for it," says Dr. Peter Hersh, head of the Cornea and Laser Eye Institute in Teaneck. (Participants need to be between 45 and 60 years old — a large percentage of the baby boomers.)

The inlay, he explains, is placed within the cornea into a corneal pocket, similar to the corneal flap that a doctor would create during Lasik surgery.

"This is an implant that's about one-third the size of a contact lens, an inlay placed within the cornea that increases the depth of field," he says. "It extends the range of focus for somebody who needs reading glasses."

Good results so far

Now in the final phase of clinical FDA trials in the U.S., the inlay works for people who need reading glasses, but not distancevision correction



Actors in a Bausch & Lomb TV commercial pass the glasses to read the restaurant menu.

as well. "Patients will need to be followed for two years afterwards to make sure the outcome is good and that the procedure's safe and effective," Hersh says, adding: "But in the early stages, we've been very pleased with what we've seen."

In the meantime, there are other surgical procedures that address presbyopia.

One is Monovision Lasik, "where you're taking one eye and making it just a little bit nearsighted [to better see things up close] and [giving] the other eye better focus for distance. Then, your brain blends those together, which is satisfactory and acceptable to

most people," says Hersh, who prefers to use this for patients who need glasses for both distance and reading.

Hersh has also been doing another procedure, conductive keratoplasty, or CK, since it was approved in 2002 for presbyopia. "CK uses a radio frequency, which applies ... eight spots in a circle around the cornea," says Hersh.

"These spots reshape the collagen to give you a new corneal shape that combines a Monovision and multifocal approach." (He generally uses CK for patients who just need reading glasses.)

Virtually all baby boomers

are now of an age to be troubled by presbyopia, which usually starts to manifest itself by your mid-40s, Hersh says.

Happens to everyone

"Presbyopia is caused by the age-related stiffening of the natural lens inside your eye," he explains. "In order to focus, the lens normally expands and contracts, but as you get older, it cannot expand and contract as well, so you don't get as much magnification out of it. You have to hold the image and objects farther and farther away until your arm's no longer long enough, and you need reading glasses."

No one, not even those who had never worn glasses, escapes this.

"They've been doing studies for hundreds of years, since Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals, and people at the same age have [gone through this]," Hersh says.

Today, the presbyopic market is "enormous," involving an estimated 50 million to 60 million people, says Bausch & Lomb's Huels.

Bifocal contact lenses have been around for decades, and there are other companies that offer multifocal contacts. Bausch & Lomb's multi-focal portfolio includes two brands of soft contact lenses (made of different materials), launched in 2002 and 2006.

"The technologies were out for a while, but consumer awareness was still pretty low, which is why we decided to try to reach out to consumers via the mass media advertising," says Huels.

So that's why we've been seeing a lot of those TV commercials lately. Although some people object to reading glasses on aesthetic grounds — "they don't want to be caught dead" wearing them — that commercial with the restaurant couple reflects another big gripe that often surfaces.

Says Huels, "When we talk to focus groups, consumers are always talking about the hassle of carrying them around."

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