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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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 distance vision correction as well. “Patients who need glasses for both distance and reading, Hersh has also 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.”

E-mail: rohan@northjersey.com

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