Presbyopia

This is a refractive condition that occurs with age. It is an inability to shift focus from distance to near, and begins in most people around the age of 40. The cause of the condition is not completely understood, but studies indicate it is a combination of deterioration of the accommodative muscles of the eye and a decrease in the flexibility of the eye’s natural lens.

The effect on a patient’s vision depends on any preexisting refractive conditions.

Nearsighted individuals find that they can no longer see with their correction on and must remove them. This allows them to bypass a shift in focus and use their natural short focus to see near objects. Normal sighted individuals find that they must begin holding near objects at a greater distance to reduce the amount of focusing they must do to see. Farsighted individuals may find that in addition to having to hold things at a greater distance to see near objects, they may also have a greater need for correction at distance.

Treatment:

As this is a refractive condition, glasses or contact lenses are used to compensate for the decreased function of the near focusing system of the eye. There are currently no surgeries or exercises that can reverse this process.

Glasses Options:

1. Separate glasses for distance and near require the patient to switch between different glasses based on task at hand. This can be inconvenient and usually works best for patients with low prescription that do not need glasses full time.
2. Lined bifocals are the traditional correction that provide both a distance segment and near segment in a single lens. The areas are demarcated by a line which can speed adjustment by making the areas easy to find.
3. Lined trifocals have defined areas for distance and near, like a bifocal. In addition they also have a small band for intermediate tasks such as computers and dashboards.
4. Progressive Addition Lenses are multifocal. They have no “lines” and have a gradual change in power as the eyes move down the lens. This allows a very natural range of focus with no breaks in vision. Because these focal areas are not defined by lines the adaptation period for these lenses can take a little longer for some patients.
5. **Reading Glasses** correct only for near. These are an option for patients that need no distance correction. Ready-made readers are available from many sources and quality can vary. If you choose this option your doctor will recommend the correct power for you.

**Contact Lens Options:**

1. **Distance contact lenses with reading glasses** for near work are often recommended in the early stages of the condition when help is not always needed at near.

2. **Monovision Contact Fit** allows any type of contact brand to be adjusted to allow both near and distance viewing. This involves the focus of one eye being set for distance and one for near. Patients lose a large portion of their depth perception when this is done. Intermediate vision is not addressed in this situation. Some patients have adaptation issues with this lost of binocular (two eye) vision.

3. **Multifocal Contacts** are now available for most patients. These lenses function differently from multifocal glasses. They provide balanced vision that allows most everyday tasks to be performed without glasses. They do require some compromise on very detailed distance and near viewing. Some patients notice difficulty with mild shadowing around some letters and haloing of lights in very dim lighting situations.

**Presbyopia** increases in magnitude until around 55 years of age. For most patients the initial need for near assistance will be limited to certain tasks and lighting situations. Over time this need for near assistance will become necessary for any task within several feet of the patient. **Most patients find that the type of correction they desire will change over time as their dependence on help increases. A delay in the use of near aids does not slow the development of this condition!**

The UHC Vision Clinic is available to students, student’s spouses/partners, faculty/staff, and dependents. It offers the full range of optometric care as well as a large retail inventory of frames and lenses. **Appointments are necessary and can be made online (students) or by phone.** Call 706-542-5617 or visit [http://www.uhs.uga.edu/services/vision_clinic.html](http://www.uhs.uga.edu/services/vision_clinic.html)