



PRESBYOPIA

YOUR 40-YEAR-OLD EYES CAN CHANGE IN A BLINK OF AN EYE

You might remember when your parents turned 40 and mentioned how their bodies were rapidly changing right before their eyes. You probably gave them a confused but interesting gaze, then thought they were crazy because you couldn't see what they saw.

Now I am 40, and I realize the “magical” mystery of the aging body my mother and father talked about. I'm now aware of the changes that can occur — and quickly. Many things have changed as I have aged; one major change was my vision. I noticed that I cannot see my cellphone, a restaurant menu, or food labels close-up as well as I once did. I've found myself holding my cellphone and other items farther away. When the changes started, I was already wearing prescription glasses, and I realized I was lifting them up so I could read things more clearly. This particular change in your vision is called presbyopia.

Presbyopia is a normal, unpreventable process of aging. Everyone has the ability to see images because of their cornea, a nonflexible, clear, dome-shaped portion in front of the eye, and the lens, which is clear, flexible, and located behind the cornea. The cornea and lens work together to show you images from light reflected on objects. With age, the ability to focus on nearby objects lessens.

A person can develop presbyopia sooner than the age of 40 because of certain diseases, such as diabetes or multiple sclerosis, or certain medications, like antihistamines, antidepressants, and/or diuretics.

Some people may experience eye strain or headaches if they work close-up on things, such as a computer, for prolonged periods throughout their day. Some may also experience blurry vision. The good news is that

this condition can be corrected. One easy option is corrective eyeglasses or contact lenses. A not-so-easy alternative is corrective surgery.

There are different surgical choices available, such as refractive surgery, which changes the shape of your cornea to improve your close-up vision. Surgeons can also remove a patient's natural eye lenses and replace them with synthetic lenses. Corneal inlay surgery involves implanting a small ring with a central opening that channels light into the eye, much like a camera works.

As I've aged, I've realized presbyopia isn't the only condition I'll encounter. If you're near 40 and experiencing these vision changes, see your eye care professional for a basic eye exam. And make eye exams part of your health routine.

Eating sensibly can help your eyes by reducing the risk of potentially vision-damaging diseases such as diabetes. Use good lighting, and protect your eyes from sun rays. I now know it wasn't magic that caused the changes in my parents' vision — and that we shouldn't turn a blind eye to vision health.

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