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# Chuck Your Reading Glasses

These cutting-edge solutions will help you see clearly again

By Meryl Davids Landau



Do you hold the menu so far away that you almost knock over the Merlot? By their mid-40s, most women have developed presbyopia, that annoying inability to focus clearly on objects closer than 1 foot or so. Bifocals are an imperfect fix at best--you lose them, sit on them, or (worst of all) keep them dangling granny-style on a chain around your neck. But now, thanks to recent advances--some surgical, others blade free--you can throw away your reading glasses and still easily peruse anything from steamy page-turners to annual reports. Here, the latest options, and how to know which is right for you.

### If you want the easiest fix?

**Try monovision contacts** You keep your current prescription for your dominant eye (the one you'd naturally leave open if you looked

through a telescope) but get a slightly weaker Rx for the other, to allow for a crisper close-up. "The result is close-to-perfect vision," explains Edward S. Bennett, OD, an associate professor of optometry at the University of Missouri-St. Louis College of Optometry.

*Keep in mind* It can take 4 weeks for your brain to adjust to the mismatch and you may have occasional headaches in the meantime. And because you need two eyes working together for depth perception and sharp far vision, you'll likely need to wear distance glasses on top of your contacts for tasks like driving.

### If you want the sharpest vision without surgery?

**Try bifocal contacts** As with bifocal glasses, different areas of bifocal contact lenses offer corrections for near and far vision (the near correction is typically on the bottom or in the center of the lens, while distance correction is around or above it). These contacts used to be a poor substitute for granny specs, but no longer. "Newer models add more near-power to help with reading," says Bennett.

*Keep in mind* Gas-permeable lenses are best: In Bennett's study of 32 people with presbyopia, they offered vision as crisp as wearing reading glasses. Soft contacts leave you with slightly fuzzier sight but are more comfortable.

### If you squint at everything?

**Try multifocal contacts** A few years after close-up sharpness declines, middle distances like your computer screen may start to get blurry, says Lama Al-Aswad, MD, an assistant professor of clinical ophthalmology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. Multifocal contacts have an additional correction so you see not only the movie screen and newspaper but also everything in between. They come in soft and gas-permeable versions, plus an extra option called hybrid multifocals. Hybrid contacts have a soft periphery and a gas-permeable center, which make it easier to adapt to the lenses.

*Keep in mind* Multifocal lenses typically layer all the corrections in front of your pupil, letting your brain choose which to ignore. But because your brain can mess up, images are sometimes slightly blurry. Hybrid lenses have an extra downside: They tear more easily.

### If you want to wake up seeing clearly?

**Try Lasik** Doctors have been using LASIK--the 5-minute procedure in which the cornea is cut and reshaped with a computer-controlled laser--for years to correct presbyopia. But they had to use a jerry-rigged method to do it: The computer calculated distance vision for one eye, while the doc manually weakened the correction for the other eye to allow for better close-up vision. (The results can be imprecise but don't endanger eyesight.) But in the summer of 2007, the FDA approved a machine specifically for presbyopia. "It digitally measures both eyes, giving superaccurate results," **says Robert Maloney, MD, a clinical professor of ophthalmology at UCLA.**

*Keep in mind* If you're extremely farsighted or if you have certain diseases, such as **rheumatoid arthritis** or type 1 **diabetes**, LASIK isn't a good option: There's more risk of **complications** and it's also more likely that your vision won't improve significantly, **Maloney says**. If this approach is right for you, it's possible that you'll need distance glasses for driving, especially at night. Finally, there's been increasing attention paid recently to LASIK's side effects (which include double vision, halos, and glare from bright lights). In April, the FDA announced plans for a study to determine how often they occur and how severe they tend to be.

Last Update: 09/17/2008

Issue Date: November 2008 Copyright 2008, Prevention