

The Cure for the Common Vision Problem

Are things a little fuzzy? Corrective eyewear could clear up the problem.

Finding the world around you a little out of focus lately? You're in good company. More than 75 percent of Americans require vision correction. While a vision problem can put a damper on your daily activities, in many cases it can be corrected with prescriptive eyewear. You can find brief descriptions below on some of the more common vision problems that can be corrected with eyeglasses or contact lenses. If any of these conditions describes your vision, be sure to schedule an exam with your eye doctor today. Help may be just a pair of prescriptive eyewear away.

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Farsightedness (hyperopia): People with farsightedness can usually see objects clearly at a distance, but find it hard or impossible to focus up close. In severe cases, it takes continual effort to focus on objects at all distances. Farsightedness can interfere with reading, writing and many close-up fine-motor tasks, and it can lead to headaches, fatigue and eye strain.

Hyperopia is sometimes seen in babies and children younger than about 8, but as their eyes grow, this condition can resolve itself. Most farsightedness can be corrected with eyeglasses or contacts that use plus, also known as convex lenses. Thicker at the center and thinner at the edges, these lenses are designed to bend light toward the center and move the focal point forward so that light is focused on, rather than behind, the retina.

Nearsightedness (myopia): People with nearsightedness have trouble seeing objects at a distance. Their vision is clear up close, sometimes up to just inches or feet away. Beyond that, objects become fuzzy or out of focus. Myopia interferes with lots of day-to-day activities, like driving, taking classes, sports and even recognizing friends at a distance. Moreover, it can cause serious eye strain, fatigue and headaches. Myopia often is first seen in children younger than 12. It may worsen with age until early adulthood, when it usually stabilizes. To correct myopia, an eyeglass or contact lens that is concave, or thinner at the center than at the edges, is used to direct light away from the center of the lens and move the focal point of the light back, so that it reaches the retina.

Presbyopia: Is your favorite magazine harder to read these days? Don't worry. Presbyopia is an age-related condition. It happens to everyone. As you reach your 40s or 50s, you may find it harder to focus on nearby objects, like book or magazine print, especially in low light. Untreated, presbyopia can lead to headaches and eye fatigue when doing close work.

While presbyopia shares some symptoms with farsightedness, they aren't the same. Farsightedness is caused by an irregularly shaped eye, whereas presbyopia occurs when the lens of your eye becomes less flexible, even in correctly shaped eyes.

Presbyopia can be corrected with reading, bifocal or multifocal eyeglasses, or with bifocal or multifocal contact lenses. Multifocal contact lenses enable you to see both near and far in each eye. Regular contact lenses can also correct the problem through "monovision," where one eye has a contact lens with a prescription to see up close, while the other eye has a contact lens with a prescription to see far away. Depending on the extent of the monovision, a single contact lens may be all that's needed.

Astigmatism: If you have trouble focusing at any distance, you may have astigmatism, a common condition that affects many people—children as well as adults. People with astigmatism have blurry or distorted vision at all distances, varying with the strength of the astigmatism. They're often nearsighted or farsighted as well.

Astigmatism can interfere with daily activities that require seeing far away, like reading road signs, as well as close-up activities, like reading a magazine. Untreated, astigmatism can lead to headaches, fatigue, squinting and pain in the muscles around the eye.

There are two types of astigmatism. The first, called corneal, occurs when the cornea is more football-shaped instead of being round like a baseball. Light that enters an astigmatic eye has two points of focus, both of which may be blurry rather than just one sharp point of focus on the retina like in a normal eye. The second, called lenticular, occurs from irregular curvatures of the lens of the eye. Both types can be present at the same time.

Most astigmatism can be treated with eyeglasses or specially designed contact lenses, which are thicker in the middle of the lens and thinner toward the edge. Since people with astigmatism can suffer from myopia or hyperopia, such specially designed lenses can also be used to correct either of those conditions. A licensed eye care professional can help you choose the right eyewear to fit your needs. If you are interested in eyeglasses or contact lenses specifically designed to treat astigmatism, talk to your eye care professional today.

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WARNING: UV-absorbing contact lenses are NOT substitutes for protective UV-absorbing eyewear such as UV-absorbing goggles or sunglasses because they do not completely cover the eye and surrounding area. You should continue to use UV-absorbing eyewear as directed. **NOTE:** Long-term exposure to UV radiation is one of the risk factors associated with cataracts. Exposure is based on a number of factors such as environmental conditions (altitude, geography, cloud cover) and personal factors (extent and nature of outdoor activities). UV-blocking contact lenses help provide protection against harmful UV radiation. However, clinical studies have not been done to demonstrate that wearing UV-blocking contact lenses reduces the risk of developing cataracts or other eye disorders. Consult your eye care practitioner for more information.

Important information for contact lens wearers: An eye care professional will determine whether contact lenses are right for you. Although rare, serious eye problems can develop while wearing contact lenses. To help avoid these problems, follow the wear and replacement schedule and the lens care instructions provided by your eye doctor. Do not wear contact lenses if you have an eye infection or experience eye discomfort, excessive tearing, vision changes, redness or other eye problems. If one of these conditions occurs, contact your eye doctor immediately. For more information on proper wear, care and safety, talk to your eye care professional.