



Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photos

Dr. Suresh Mandava with Stamford resident Mary Valentine during a visit to Fairfield County Laser Vision. She reads a sample menu to determine how well her contacts are working.

# THE FAR SIDE

READING GLASSES ARE AN INEVITABLE PART OF MIDDLE AGE

## LOOK STYLISH IN READING GLASSES

Slipping on a pair of reading glasses for the first time can lead to seeing a style crisis in the mirror.

"People are worried they are going to look like a granny, and not in a good way," says New York-based designer Corrine McCormack, whose fashion-forward reading glasses are sold locally at the Stamford Lord & Taylor.

"The truth is that readers can actually be a style statement. As baby boomers have aged, we've figured out how to do this with some grace," says McCormack. "So if you don't want to look like granny, you don't have to look like granny."

Wearing them with style involves mixing a bit of attitude with a frame in the right shape and color, says McCormack.

"I enjoy wearing a pop of color, like maybe a red as a style statement," she says. "And I like to have a great black or tortoise pair to coordinate with a lot of my outfits."

The first tip for getting readers right is paying attention to the shape of your face as well as your coloring says Margahret Hollander, owner of the Optical Shop on Main Street in Westport.

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## By Beth Cooney

Staff Writer

It can creep up on you in the middle of the night, when the dosage label on the medicine bottle cannot be deciphered. Suddenly the baby sitter's phone number, written in your own careful script, is no longer legible.

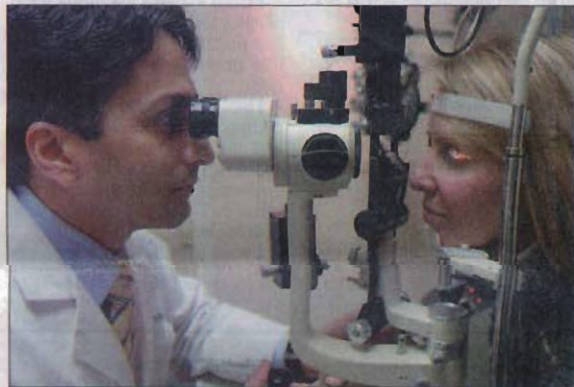
Somewhere between the ages of 40 and 50, blur happens.

"The worst thing was reading a menu in a restaurant, or price tag when I was shopping," says Stamford resident Mary Valentine, wife of baseball great and former New York Mets coach Bobby Valentine, describing how her close vision began to diminish in her 40s. "My husband got so bad when we went to a restaurant, he would just order the specials. It was easier than trying to see the menu."

It's what eye doctors describe as an inevitable transition of middle age, farsightedness — a condition known as presbyopia — changes the shape of the cornea, thinning it out. Corneal muscles may also weaken, making it harder to see. It can start with little changes: squinting at the phone book or the dim evening light or struggling to read the tiny numbers flashing on the ringing cell phone screen. As it progresses, experts say it can have a real impact on quality of life if not addressed with corrective lenses or surgical options.

No nifty exercise, no bag of carrots will help.

"It is the harsh reality of middle age," says Dr. Eric Wasserman, an ophthalmologist



Mandava recently fit Mary Valentine with a single contact lens intended to improve her close vision.

affiliated with Stamford Hospital. "And the truth is I've never seen anyone escape it. I think the oldest person I put in reading glasses was maybe 52 and he was kind of amazing to me."

Eyewear designer Corrine McCormack slipped on her first pair of corrective reading glasses at age 45. "It was like clockwork. One day I could see, the next day I was squinting. The first thing that went for me was numbers. I was always confusing a three and a eight. Or a one and seven."

How and when adults lose their reading vision is a process that can be aggravated or delayed by a number of variables, notes Wasserman and Dr. Suresh Mandava, an ophthalmologist and eye surgeon affiliated with Greenwich Hospital.

"Genetics are a factor, so are things like how your eyesight has been before middle age," says Mandava, who practices with Greenwich

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# Far side

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Ophthalmology Associates and is medical director of Fairfield County Laser Vision in Stamford.

Usually, the last people to need reading glasses are people who have long worn glasses to correct myopia, the condition that makes it difficult to see at a distance.

"They usually have the strongest close vision," says Wasserman, who operates the Eye Care Center of Stamford.

Often, people who wear corrective lenses for distance vision will begin to complain about a lapse in their ability to read in their early 40s. "But if you take your glasses off or remove your contacts, you may notice your vision is fine," says Wasserman. The reason for the discrepancy, he explains, is "the corrective lenses start to neutralize your close vision."

Other medical problems such as cataracts also can affect the condition, notes Mandava, adding, "In some cases, cataracts can actually improve vision in some people who've worn reading glasses for years."

Beginning with a comprehensive eye exam, reading vision

can usually be addressed in stages.

Initially, the best option may be the "squint and bear it approach," says Wasserman. Reading glasses can create a dependency and weaken already diminished muscles, making the problem worsen faster.

The downside? "Squinting and wrinkles go hand in hand," says Mandava. "So glasses are a better bet for keeping crow's feet from getting worse."

Inexpensive reading glasses that can be bought in bulk at big box stores or pricier boutiques will often do the trick in early stages.

"If your prescription is the same in both eyes, they will work," says Mandava. "It can be trickier if your prescription is different in both eyes, then those cheap glasses may not be your best bet."

Cheap readers also can be a good option for people with a tendency to misplace things, says Wasserman. "Then you can leave them all over the house. Tuck one in your purse or briefcase. Leave a pair at the office. I have them everywhere." His one caution on over-the-counter readers, "Start with the weakest prescription available. Otherwise you may

overcorrect and create that dependency."

The doctors outlined several options for correcting vision as it continues to diminish. They include surgery, bifocals and readers.

Mandava recently fit Mary Valentine with a single contact lens intended to improve her reading vision. Using one contact might sound a bit odd "and people worry about their balance or vision being right," but Mandava says after a brief period of adjustment, "many people find it very effective."

Several years ago, Valentine had Lasik surgery to correct her distance vision, but found recently, "I was squinting and digging in my purse for reading glasses." A few days after the fitting, she was adjusting to the lens, but says, "It's very comfortable. And I can read without glasses."

On her husband, Mandava performed a procedure known as conductive keratoplasty or Near-VisionCK. Done in less than three minutes, the procedure involves no cutting, instead using a small probe and radio waves that reshape the cornea. "It was quick, painless and he can read menus again," says Mary Valentine.

Mandava says not everyone is a candidate for the procedure. "Factors such as very thin corneas or other issues with a prescription," can rule someone out.

Many patients will instead opt for prescription readers or a bifocal-type lens if their distance or mid-range vision is also an issue, says Wasserman.

Old-school bifocals, with an obvious dual lens, are virtually obsolete, notes Margahret Hollander, owner of The Optical Shop in Westport. "I am much more likely to be fitting someone with a progressive lens, where the bifocal is not so obvious. It is a much more attractive, more youthful option."

A bifocal contact is a trickier prospect, notes Wasserman. "They can be hard to wear. It can be harder to get the vision quite right." Still, he notes, "I love them for people who tend to lose their glasses, which can be as miserable as not seeing."

Before grabbing any pair of readers or even a magnifying glass, get a comprehensive eye exam. "It's kind of like an oil change on your car," says Mandava. "It is a good time to come in and see how your eyes are doing."