

Surgery Presbyopia

CK reduces reading glasses to fashion statements

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For The Journal News

Baby boomers, take note. If you're tired of constantly putting on and taking off your reading glasses, having to replace them, or stockpiling extra pairs reading glasses in case you lose them, or simply, if you're in complete denial and refuse to acknowledge your aging eyes, a viable solution may be within reach.

Conductive Keratoplasty (more commonly known as CK) is the newest corrective vision procedure specifically aimed at patients who have presbyopia — a natural deterioration of near vision that most often occurs after the magical age of 40. Approved by the Food and Drug Administration two years ago for the improvement of near vision, the CK procedure is a non-surgical method that uses radio frequency energy or pulses instead of a laser or scalpel to reshape the cornea. Therein lies the appeal, especially to potential patients who may be somewhat squeamish about eye surgery — laser or otherwise.

"This procedure appeals to the risk adverse, because of its simplicity and lack of significant complications," explains Scarsdale resident Dr. Thierry Hufnagel, of the Stahl Eye Center, with offices in Manhattan and Garden City and Hauppauge, Long Island. To ophthalmologists, the benefits of CK are crystal clear:

► The procedure is minimally invasive. CK works by changing a pre-determined number of spots (16 on average) on the cornea through the delivery of radio frequency energy to the periphery of the cornea. The radio frequency pulses are delivered through a tiny probe tip that is roughly the thickness of a human hair.

► CK is performed in only one eye. Similar to the mono-vision system used with contact lenses—the near vision is corrected in only one eye—usually the non-dominant eye. As Dr. Liviu Saimovici, Chief of Refractive Surgery at St. Vincent Hospital in Manhattan and an attending physician at Mount Sinai, explains, "The art of this procedure is creating near vision in one eye and distance vision in the other. Usually, the dominant eye is on the same side as the hand you write with, although sometimes the opposite is true."

► There are virtually no side effects. Since only the periphery of the cornea is involved in the CK procedure and there is no cutting or laser, the risk of scarring is elim-



Dr. Liviu B. Saimovici, who has offices in Somers and in Manhattan, practices conductive keratoplasty, a kind of eye surgery that helps eliminate the need for reading glasses.

inated and the chance of infection is minimized. "The worst that can happen is that you get the procedure and find that it really doesn't work for you and you need to keep wearing your reading glasses," says Dr. Hufnagel.

Finding out whether the procedure will work for you or not is usually discovered before the CK procedure is even scheduled. The first step to a future without reading glasses is determining whether you are a good candidate for the CK procedure. Who makes a good candidate? "Someone who's very motivated to be free from reading glasses and doesn't mind having slightly different distance vision," says Dr. Saimovici, a Westchester resident who splits his time between Manhattan and the Somers Eye Center.

Making that determination is done a week or so before through an examination that includes a simulation of the corrected vision. A contact lens is used to give the patient a preview of the results and see how well he or she tolerates the mono-vision system. Not everyone can tolerate having different vision in each eye. Patients who don't find it comfortable or experience blurry distance vision may decide against the procedure.

Because of its safety and simplicity (the procedure takes less than five minutes), there is a growing interest in the CK procedure. "CK is now taking hold," Dr. Saimovici says. "People have been so conditioned to thinking there's not much that can be done to correct near vision. I think all refractive procedures will grow, but this one may grow at a greater rate." He adds, "For consumers, the options are making things better and worse at the same time. There are more refractive procedures being approved, but at the same time, more choices can also be more confusing, especially when you're bombarded with advertising."

According to Dr. Hufnagel, with only 40,000 of the 1.5 million potential patients (that's 1 in 10 potential patients) opting for the procedure in 2004, "we're not even seeing the tip of the iceberg." He expects the demand to increase significantly with awareness.

Dr. Hufnagel and Dr. Saimovici both agree that CK, with no pain and little or no discomfort afterwards, may be the safest refractive procedure of all. Dr. Saimovici indicated that the most discomfort his patients have reported experiencing is a slight irritation — feeling like a grain of sand in their eye

— for a short time afterwards.

But Sylvia Lipiecki, of Yonkers, one of Dr. Saimovici's patients who underwent the procedure in May, says she really didn't experience discomfort. "The procedure was very fast. It only took a few minutes and afterwards, I was able to see and read immediately. I could see my watch right away." At age 52, Lipiecki, was tired of her six-year dependency on reading

glasses, carrying glasses with her at all times and having to pull them out to read restaurant menus. "Now I can read the menu, I can see what's on my plate and I can read anything in the store — even the smallest print. I love it!" she said just a few days following the procedures.

A successful procedure doesn't necessarily mean throwing your reading glasses away. Patients

For more information

www.refractec.com

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may find they occasionally need them once in a while. "If it's dark, and you want to read a 300-page novel in 10-point type or study the stock market report, you may find it easier with reading glasses," Dr. Hufnagel explains.

One downside to CK is paying for the procedure. (The per-eye cost can range from \$1,500 to \$2,500.) As the eyes continue to age, another CK procedure may be required in two years. Lipiecki feels it was well worth it, even as she is prepared for the possibility of keeping a spare pair of glasses by the computer. Lipiecki and her husband, who had LASIK surgery at the hand of Dr. Saimovici on the same day, are enjoying their newfound freedom of going to restaurants without checking to make sure they have their reading glasses on hand.

Lipiecki has no regrets and her enthusiasm is contagious. "I'm really, really happy," she exclaims. "It's like getting 10 years younger!"

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