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SHOULD YOU WEAR OVER THE COUNTER READING GLASSES

Over-the-counter reading glasses are inexpensive eyeglasses that can be purchased in variety, drug, and discount stores without a prescription. They can be used instead of prescription reading glasses, but they are not an ideal substitute, which you will discover as soon as you try them. Still, they may work for you. If so, they can come in handy if you like to have several pairs of reading glasses lying around in different places or if you tend to misplace your reading glasses.

How Do Ready-Made Glasses Differ from Prescription Reading Glasses?

Non-prescription lenses for reading are simply magnifying glasses mounted in frames. They are not usually up to the quality of those ground in a prescription laboratory, and the optical centers of the lenses are not likely to be in the precise position that gives you the best and most comfortable reading vision. The frames are likely to be "one size fits all."

Prescription glasses, on the other hand, are custom ground to your exact vision needs. The position of your eyes as you read or work is measured by a skilled optical dispenser. The frames are adjusted to fit your face, taking into account the width of your face, size of your nose, and distance between your eyes. Attention to all these factors can make a huge difference in reading comfort.

Can Non-Prescription Glasses Hurt Your Eyes?

No. Even if they are not particularly comfortable to wear, they cannot ever damage or ruin your eyes. So there's certainly no harm in trying them.

Can Everyone Wear Them?

Not everyone. The ideal candidate for over-the-counter reading glasses has good distance vision in both eyes without glasses, little or no astigmatism, and symmetrical face and eyes. But even if you can't use them for all your reading and close work, the glasses might be useful for short tasks like reading menus and phone books. Be aware, too, that if you wear bifocals or multifocals (which combine a distance correction with a reading correction), reading glasses are only a partial substitute. With them, you have to switch to your other glasses whenever you want to see clearly across the room.

How Can You Tell Which Pair To Buy?

As you look over the assortment, begin by looking at the optical powers. Start with the weakest power lenses and try to read with them. If the print is blurry at your normal reading distance, move on to the next stronger one. The best one for you is the lowest power that can suit your needs. (Most people make the mistake of starting with the strongest powers. The truth is, the higher the power, the closer you will have to hold your reading material, and the shallower your range of clear reading vision.) Once you've settled on the power, you can shift your attention to selecting a frame style you like. Don't neglect trying the half-frame style, which is a very useful form that solves the looking-across-the-room problem.

Do You Need an Eye Exam Before Buying Them?

Not necessarily. But since you are in the age group that needs reading glasses, you should have a complete eye examination every year or so, to check for non-symptomatic sight-threatening conditions such as glaucoma. You should not postpone or forego regular eye examinations simply because you can comfortably use over-the-counter reading glasses.