Prisms correct vision

Patients who come to Drs. Debby and Paul Feinberg have a range of symptoms that may be diagnosed as vertical heterophoria syndrome, a condition in which one eye sees images higher than the other.

Symptoms
- Headaches.
- Dizziness.
- Nausea.
- Anxiety, especially in open spaces or when driving.
- Head tilt.
- Uneven lines on the forehead because of continual tilt of head.
- Neck and shoulder discomfort.
- Blurred vision.
- Double vision.
- Poor depth perception.
- Sensitivity to bright light.
- Motion sickness.
- Unsteadiness while walking.
- Problems with reading such as words running together.

What goes wrong

Muscles around each eye help the eyes work together. When the muscles have to compensate for misaligned eyes, they get tired, resulting in a variety of symptoms such as headaches, problems with balance and problems seeing clearly.

Vertical heterophoria syndrome may cause double, shadowy or blurry vision.

Diagnosis and treatment

1. The patient fills out a Quality of Vision questionnaire and a health history form.
2. The doctor determines if the patient needs correction for nearsightedness, farsightedness and/or astigmatism.
3. The doctor performs tests that measure the visual alignment. If misalignment is present, one eye may be visibly higher than the other eye.
4. Using a trial frame, the patient is fitted with the new prescription, which includes a prism to correct their vision.
5. Results from the trial-framing process are often immediate and dramatic. Patients report symptoms are reduced within the first 20-30 minutes. After receiving their new glasses, a two-week follow-up visit is scheduled.

The fix often takes months to a year (based on the severity), but finding early treatment can help. Some people can be diagnosed as early as age 6.

Insurance may pay some plans don’t.

An unusual invitation

In September, Dr. Art Rosner, a Royal Oak and Beaumont Eye Institute specialist in Birmingham, issued a special invitation for patients and other specialists to attend a meeting of the American Academy of Otolaryngology in Los Angeles. It’s an unusual move for an optometrist to admit nieces, nephews, and other specialists.

Often, patients will visit their primary care physician or ear, nose and throat specialist.

“Many people do not understand what is going on and are often referred to specialists because they are confused,” Rosner said.

One of the specialists, Dr. Debby Feinberg, is a Birmingham optometrist who sees many people with the condition. She has treated 650 people at Vision Specialists of Birmingham for the problem. Many had gone undiagnosed for eight to 12 years despite taking months to a year (based on the severity), but finding early treatment can help. Some people can be diagnosed as early as age 6.

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“Many people do not understand what is going on and are often referred to specialists because they are confused,” Rosner said.

Openings for patients and other specialists are available on the Academy’s website: www.osa.org. Patients may also call the American Academy of Otolaryngology for more information: 1-800-332-2677.