



I can't get on with varifocals... or can I?

I see many patients who have tried varifocals and not been able to get on with them and so are struggling with 2 separate pairs or bifocals. In my experience most of these varifocal failures are due to poor fitting or inappropriate lens design.

Varifocal (or 'progressive') lenses allow you to see clearly in the distance, then the focus of the lens changes gradually as you lower your gaze, giving you a portion of the lens for intermediate work and the lowest part for close work such as reading.

They are like cars, there are many different makes and models, all with slightly different performance and features. Some have a narrow central channel, which is ideal if you mainly look at things in the distance or close up. Others have a wider central portion which might be suitable if you do a lot of work at a middle distance, such as on a work bench or computer.

The most important part of dispensing varifocals is understanding the patient, their prescription, visual needs, expectations and lifestyle. All of these inform in the lens design selection process.

Many of the retail optical chains, in a bid to simplify the dispensing process, select 3 levels of varifocal and present them as basic, mid and top range options. These are often sourced from one manufacturer, as that allows them to negotiate a higher discount and maximise profit. Many of the 'buy one get one free' offers utilise the cheapest lenses which are inevitably, often the least sophisticated designs. In many instances, these are the first and last, experience patients have with varifocal lenses.

The fitting process is also key to success. The lens graduation is calculated from the optical centre: This is a point on the principal axis of a lens through which light passes without undergoing any deviation. In other words, a ray of light passing through the optical centre will not change its direction. The optical centre of the lens is positioned directly in front of the pupil so that when the wearer looks across the room with a natural head position he or she can see clearly at a distance.

The power of the lens then progressively becomes more positive as the eye travels down the lens. Towards the bottom of the lens is the near vision

prescription (which is normally set to focus at around 14-16") to enable clear vision for reading. The term natural head position is important. Some people stand to attention and therefore look through a lower point on the lens. Others have rounded shoulders and therefore their gaze is directed through a higher part of the lens. If this measurement is inaccurate the lenses will not function as intended.

So don't give up on varifocals. In over 30 years of dispensing varifocal lenses I have rarely found a patient whose prescription and lifestyle are compatible for varifocals; who cannot wear them successfully, when they are accurately fitted with the most appropriate lens design.

If you have found this article interesting and have questions regarding it, then please do get in touch either for a chat by phone, or please feel free to email me.

Debra Watts F.B.D.O.

Ringlands Optics

Tel: 01264 333 092

Mobile: 07764 455 333

Email: ringlandsoptics@live.co.uk

Web: www.ringlandsoptics.co.uk