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Lunchtime fix: Conductive keratoplasty

Want to ditch the reading glasses but scared of having laser treatment? Conductive keratoplasty could help you to see things more clearly. Dr David Allamby and Dr Alex Ionides explain all.

WHAT IS IT? Conductive keratoplasty was introduced to the UK in 2003 as a treatment for long-sightedness. It involves heating tiny spots of collagen on the edge of the cornea by firing radio waves through a tip, which is as fine as a hair. This tightens the collagen, which then acts like a belt to pull the cornea to a steeper angle and give the eye greater strength as a lens. The procedure takes a few minutes and is carried out using anaesthetic eye drops. Ionides believes that laser treatment is more predictable and the effects longer-lasting, but it involves the surface layer of the cornea being temporarily removed.

SEE an ophthalmologist who is a member — or ideally a fellow of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists (www.rcophth.ac.uk) and one who is trained in conductive keratoplasty. Ionides recommends you stick with doctors who also hold NHS posts.

ASK how long they have been trained in the therapy and how many procedures they have undertaken, will there be complications and how much they charge for repeat treatments. Get a second opinion if possible. Ask if you can speak to a patient who has had the treatment.

SUITABLE FOR people over 40 who used to have good vision but have developed age-related reading problems.

AVOID if you have rheumatoid arthritis, severe diabetes, if you have had eye surgery or have a lazy eye.

PAIN FACTOR Minimal

FREQUENCY It needs to be repeated every three to five years and can be “topped up” in this way two or three times, after which it becomes difficult to find suitable collagen spots to treat.

COMPLICATIONS There can be some mild, intermittent blurring for four to 12 weeks afterwards, as the brain adjusts to the change. **COMPLAINTS** Return to your surgeon for adjustments. If still dissatisfied, consult the General Medical Council (0845 3578001).

COST About £995 an eye for the initial treatment; about £500 an eye for top-ups.

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