Your Vision and Your Golf Game

Golf. For those who play, you know it is an intoxicating obscession. The only natural enemy of the game is bad weather, and the weather has to be really bad to miss a tee time.

Though hand-eye coordination is critical for all sports, perhaps golfers have the greatest dependency and the most to loose when optimum vision is impaired. Visual acuity (clarity), contrast sensitivity (seeing well in the shade or on cloudy days), depth perception, and color discrimination are only part of the story. Tournament golfers must be able to reconcile great distances, and score their own cards.

Not a problem for younger golfers, but golf is primarily a passion of those ages 40 and older, making us succumb to mother nature's meanest trick: presbyopia. Literally translated as "old eyes", presbyopia is inevitable for all people, whether nearsighted or farsighted, and requires some type of fix. Glasses are a problem because they distort our peripheral vision out to the sides of the glasses. In addition, playing 36 holes in the summer months can be miserable when the glasses are sliding down our noses. Contact lenses help in the distance, but do nothing to assist with our near (score card) or intermediate (golf club distance) needs, and bifocal contact lenses or monovision (one lens for distance and one for near) impair our depth perception, and interfere with contrast sensitivity.

(LASIK) laser vision correction has been a godsend for millions of people, many of whom (including Tiger) are avid golfers, and again, for distance, can solve a multitude of visual problems. However, several medical studies have discussed the potential problems related to seeing clearly in shadows and on cloudy days (contrast sensitivity) following laser vision correction, and of course, there is still that unavoidable issue of presbyopia (need for reading glasses). Monovision can be easily accomplished with LASIK, but significantly impairs depth perception.

So what is the over forty golfer to do?!?

Much of the refractive surgeon's attention is now turned toward intra-ocular lens procedures in which the eye's natural lens is removed, and a new, more appropriately powered lens is implanted, much like modern day cataract surgery. The best part about "refractive clear lensectomy" is that in most cases, we can implant a bifocal artificial lens, providing both distance and near vision, still allowing the person to benefit from full binocular depth perception, using both eyes together for all activities. Though most refractive surgeons agree that LASIK will remain the predominant refractive procedure for quite some time, the shift in research toward better and better technologies which more closely emulate the eye's natural focusing ability at all distance and near ranges will dominate over the next decade.

Sometimes additional procedures to reduce astigmatism and residual nearsightedness or farsightedness are necessary in order to yield the best uncorrected clarity. These procedures are performed at the same time as the initial lens procedure, or at a future time following healing and stabilization of the refractive error (prescription). It is important to note that there may still be times when a thin pair of glasses will be helpful. Never the less, the freedom from corrective eye wear in most circumstances is indescribable. Clear lensectomy as a refractive procedure has been FDA approved for a number of years, and millions of these lens implants are benefiting people in this country and around the world. For most golfers, both on and off the green, this procedure is a hole in one……