



# Seeing It Her Way

Optometrist  
straightens vision  
with prisms

By Joyce Wiswell  
Photo by Mark Moten

Some people believe in pyramid power. For Dr. Debby Feinberg, it's all about prism power.

The optometrist-owner of Vision Specialists of Birmingham uses the light-refracting device in eyeglasses to help patients with vertical heterophoria, a complex visual disorder that results in visual misalignment.

Feinberg got the idea some 20 years ago while at the Illinois College of Optometry, when she used prisms to help align the vision of a woman with a fractured eye socket. The prism bent light, and allowed the patient to see images that are synchronized.

"The two eyes are meant to work as a team," Feinberg explains. "When they don't – because one eye is physically higher than the other or sees images higher – the brain tries to force the eyes to align the images, and myriad symptoms can result."

The symptoms of vertical heterophoria run the gamut from headaches, dizziness, double vision and poor depth perception, to tightness or pain in the neck and shoulders, carsickness, even an unsteady gait. Patients frequently are misdiagnosed with attention deficit disorder or another learning disability, Feinberg says. Sufferers often see a slew of doctors but find no relief.

"These patients are so frustrated," she says. "Some feel very alone, thinking they are crazy with such weird symptoms."

Feinberg's brother-in-law, Arthur Rosner, M.D., an ear, nose and throat specialist at William Beaumont Hospital in Troy, suffered such a misalignment. Feinberg helped him out in 1984 with prismatic eyeglasses, but it wasn't until 1996 that he made the connection between his own

symptoms and patients who came into his office. As he saw patients complaining of balance problems or lightheadedness, he began making referrals to Feinberg, who has since helped more than 400 people from ages 4 to 85.

She is working with statisticians at Beaumont Hospital to get her methodology published soon in a medical journal, Feinberg says, so other doctors can be trained and then treat vertical heterophoria using prisms.

"There's a real lack of knowledge on this technique," she says, with only a few optometrists in other states using prisms as she does.

Lesley Sleeman of Rochester Hills is a believer. She came to Feinberg as a 13-year-old with such dizziness that she couldn't attend regular school. Now 16, and many prisms later, Lesley no longer has problems concentrating and reading. "I wish more people knew about Dr. Debby," she says.

Feinberg, who has a B.S. in psychology from the University of Michigan in addition to her doctor of optometry degree (O.D.), just opened her new practice on North Old Woodward in July. Previously, she worked one and a half days a week at her father's optometry practice. Now, she puts in three days each week at the Birmingham locale, and her father, Paul Feinberg, O.D., works for her. Feinberg and her husband, William Beaumont Hospital-Royal Oak emergency physician Mark Rosner, M.D., have two sons, Matthew, 10 and Alex, 13.

"The balance of spending time with my kids is really important to me," she says.

Feinberg continues to be excited by prism possibilities. "It's one thing to help someone see," she says, "and another entirely to help someone feel better all around." ♦