

The Bates Method of Vision Improvement

by

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Vision is variable. When we're tired or sick we don't see as well as when we're fresh and relaxed. Many of us saw well as children, but then something changed. Now the world does not appear as clear. When we put on glasses or contact lenses we see clearly again, but later the clarity diminishes and we need a stronger prescription.

The natural tendency of the visual system is towards 20/20 eyesight. According to an optometric study, infants, no matter how poor their vision at birth, will adapt in time to seeing better. In families where two children are given glasses for a similar problem, the child who loses or refuses to wear his or her glasses often ends up not needing them. The child who wears the glasses, however, continues to experience deteriorating vision and stronger prescriptions.

The natural tendency of vision to improve over time can be utilized. William Bates, an American Ophthalmologist at the turn of the century, noticed that his nearsighted and farsighted patients kept returning to him for ever stronger glasses. He decided to look for a treatment. His method for improving vision is based on relaxation and movement.

Bates found that eyes that don't see well when under strain. There are six muscles around each eye and three more on the inside. These muscles need to be flexible and energized in order to maintain clear accurate focus. As we relax, muscles soften and rest. This allows them to return to their more natural state and move more freely.

Vision is a function of both body and mind. Developmentally the eye is an extension of the brain, and it's the mind that sees. As a result of this body-mind connection the eyes only relax fully when the mind is relaxed. The mind relaxes when it is focused on just one thing at a time.

Using the Bates Method we teach techniques such as visualization and watching the breath to calm and focus the mind. This helps our students learn to focus in a relaxed way both inwardly and outwardly. Our next step is to put this relaxed focus into motion and integrate it into seeing. We teach specific ways to develop better visual habits and increase muscular flexibility, coordination and accuracy. As these activities are practiced it becomes easier to adapt to bright light and to see more clearly both near and at a distance. Activities such as playing catch, taking a walk, reading a book, driving a car or looking into someone's eyes become easier and more pleasurable. The eyes need to be free to explore the world and to work according to their original design.

If someone wanting to improve their eyesight wears glasses, they should consider getting a pair which gives them slightly less than 20/20 vision. The blur will remind them to practice relaxing, letting their eyes be free and activate their natural, inborn tendency towards clarity. As the vision improves, the prescription may continue to be reduced. In this way one can reduce one's dependency on glasses, or even get out of them entirely.

Bates was the first ophthalmologist to use the interrelationship of the eye and the mind to improve vision. It is a natural, economical and holistic approach of caring for the eyes, developing keener sight and heightening our pleasure in the visual world.

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