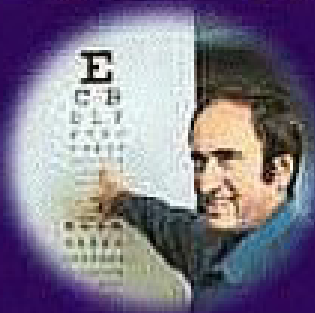


Meir Schneider

YOGA *For Your* **EYES**



*Natural Vision
Improvement
Exercises*

Includes Study Guide and Eye Exercise Chart

STUDY GUIDE

YOGA
For Your
EYES

*Natural Vision
Improvement
Exercises*

Meir Schneider

Sounds True, Inc., Boulder, CO 80306

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Also by Meir Schneider:

Books

Self-Healing: My Life and Vision (Penguin Arkana, 1989)

The Handbook of Self-Healing (with Maureen Larkin and Dror Schneider) (Penguin Arkana, 1994).

Sounds True Audiotapes

Meir Schneider's Miracle Eyesight Method (two cassettes, 1996)

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide and the *Yoga for Your Eyes* video each stand alone. The study guide is designed to give you an in-depth understanding of your own vision problems and an overview of the techniques you can use to improve them. The video is a visual aid that can guide you through the exercises in the correct way. Ideally, you should read the study guide first. Then, when you watch the video, you will have a good foundation for following along with the exercises you choose to do.

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BETTER EYESIGHT, HEALTHIER EYES

While most of us know that we can improve our health and live longer by eating better, getting regular exercise, reducing stress, and learning relaxation, when it comes to our eyes we have a kind of learned helplessness. Very few of us believe there is anything we can do to make our eyes healthier and improve our eyesight. The fact is, however, that the things we do to improve our bodily health are also good for our eyes.

The eye is not simply a mechanical tool. Like every other part of your body, it is profoundly affected by your state of mind. For no good reason, the popular belief today is that vision can only deteriorate and cannot improve. Statistics show that most people who see poorly never see well afterwards; their vision just gets worse and worse. But these statistics might look very different if we were taught how to take care of our eyes - and, even more importantly, if we understood that we have the power to improve our eyesight.

WHAT IS VISION?

Vision is the sum total of sensation, perception, and conception. Mechanically speaking, your retina has about 126 million light-sensing cells that produce some billion images every single minute. The brain cannot possibly assimilate all those images to create a picture, so it selects — basically determining how much of a picture you will and will not see. How clear or how poor your vision will be is largely a function of your brain.

Western medicine tends to ignore the complex interactions between eye and brain. Medical training puts greater emphasis on treating the symptoms. If you have cataracts, doctors will remove the lens. If you have high pressure in the eye, they will alleviate it. If you see poorly, they will give you glasses. They do not tend to go deeply into the causes of these conditions.

Yet nearsightedness, for example, is clearly the result of mental stress and the fact that your brain conceives of the world as a fuzzy place. Most children who become nearsighted do so at about third grade, when the initial excitement of learning has subsided and they begin to glimpse the unchanging pattern of school years ahead of them. Those who do not get glasses in third grade generally get them in college, when the future is not clear and seemingly endless studies lie ahead.

Farsightedness, on the other hand, tends to develop in our forties and fifties, when most divorces happen and when people ask themselves, “Could I live my life differently?” There is no question in my mind, after nearly thirty years of working with all kinds of vision problems, that your eyesight is truly a part of your mental state. Helping your eyesight is not simply an issue of getting rid of your glasses, but of dealing with your total being: your mental, emotional, and physical state in its entirety.

Causes of Poor Vision

Vision problems usually manifest as lack of clarity in either near or distant vision. The physical act of seeing things close up is different from that of seeing things in the distance. Consider, for example, how a camera works. When light rays from the object you are photographing reach the camera's lens, they need to converge so that they are focused on the film behind the lens. To focus, you change the distance between the lens and the film until it is just right — otherwise the object will not focus exactly on the film and the photo will be a blur.

In the same way, your eye needs to converge light rays from the object you are looking at and focus them behind the lens. Instead of film, you have a retina: a network of nerve cells that translates the light rays into neural information. These data are sent through the optic nerve to the brain. Where a camera changes the distance between lens and film, the eye changes the shape of the lens instead.

When the ciliary muscles that hold the lens in place are relaxed, the lens is relatively flat and allows for distant vision. When the object you are looking at is closer than twenty feet away, those muscles contract, and the lens assumes a more spherical shape. This process is called accommodation (see fig. a).

Another factor thought to determine how a person sees is the shape of the eyeball. Irregularly shaped eyeballs are considered the cause of the two most common vision problems: myopia and hyperopia. Myopia (nearsightedness) means the inability to see distant objects clearly, caused by an eyeball that is too long from front to back. This shape makes it impossible for the lens to focus the light rays from distant objects onto the retina (see fig. b), though it can focus the rays from close objects. Hyperopia, or

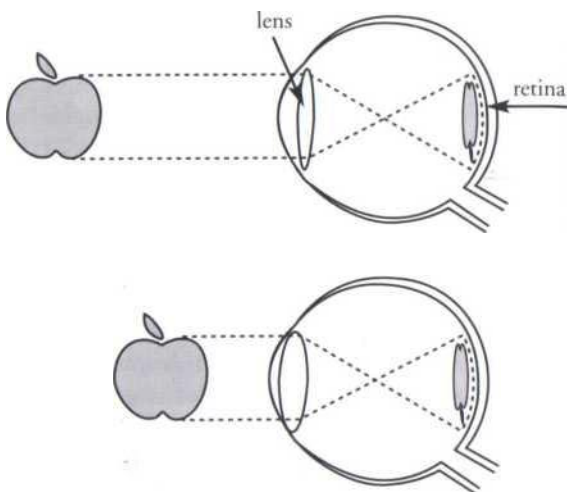


Fig. a: How an eye works: when the object is close, the lens changes shape, becoming more spherical.

hypermetropia (farsightedness), refers to the inability to see close objects clearly. Here, the eyeball is too short from front to back. Light rays from a distance focus correctly, but the lens is unable to bring the rays together before they reach the retina. If they were capable of passing through it, the rays would probably focus behind the retina (see fig. c).

These descriptions explain the mechanical conditions underlying poor vision. But what causes these physical changes to occur? In one word, the answer is stress. The eyes are as susceptible to stress as is any other part of the body, and are subjected to at least as much of it.

Two components of visual stress - prolonged, unrelieved near-focusing and tasks with high-level

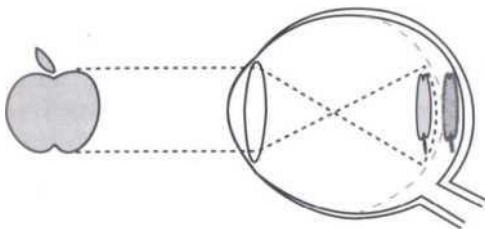


Fig. b: Myopia is caused by an eyeball that is too long from front to back. The lens can not focus distant objects onto the retina, creating a blurry image.

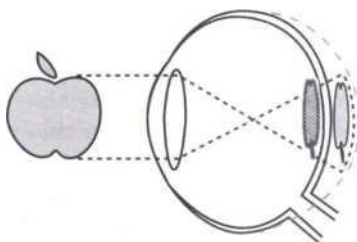


Fig. c: Hyperopia is caused by an eyeball that is too short from front to back. The lens focuses close objects beyond the retina, creating a blurry image.

cognitive demand — often coincide in school and office work. The advent of computers has compounded the problem, creating a visual/postural repetitive strain condition called computer vision syndrome (CVS). Symptoms include eyestrain, general fatigue, neck and shoulder pain, dry eyes, and difficulties in focusing. The computer screen is itself a visual stressor. Since the eye can never determine the focal length of computer pixels, it is plunged into a visual limbo in which the ciliary muscle continually quivers with unavailing effort. The visual stress of CVS tends to bring on myopia or make it worse.

Many of our actions and reactions — as well as much of our memory — are guided by mental pictures, including conscious and subconscious images of events that shaped our emotional makeup. Our eyes are stressed even when we are perceiving these only “in the mind’s eye.” All of these events take place in the brain, of which the eye is an integral part. Because of all this, and also because we use them for just about everything we do, our eyes respond strongly to our thoughts and emotions. Because they work so constantly and so hard, they are also extremely sensitive to physical pain and fatigue.

Poor vision arises from a complex interplay in the bodymind. This is why, when we begin working to improve our eyes, we need to approach this work from every possible angle. It is also why, in the process of doing so, we discover things about ourselves that we may never have suspected.

DR. WILLIAM H. BATES - OPHTHALMOLOGIC VISIONARY

You may have heard of the Bates Method: a series of exercises designed to strengthen eyesight without the use of glasses. Its creator is Dr. William H. Bates, who was born in 1860 and graduated from Cornell University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons at the age of 35. Three years later, he was serving his internship at Columbia Hospital in New York as an ear, nose, throat, and eye doctor (in those days, these specialties were combined). Dr. Bates was working as a teaching assistant, but was dismissed after repeatedly encouraging fellow doctors to go without the glasses prescribed for them by the chief ophthalmologist at the hospital eye clinic.

Dr. Bates used an instrument called the retinoscope, with which he could observe minute changes in the surface curvature of the eyes, and thereby determine the nature and degree of a patient's vision problems. Over many years, he observed the eyes of hundreds of patients in every kind of activity, emotional state, and physical condition. He noted how their eyes changed when they were doing work they enjoyed, and when they were doing work they disliked; when they were fatigued, anxious, or confused; when they were focused, excited, stimulated, or relaxed.

Among the discoveries Dr. Bates made was how visual clarity changes — in the same person — from good to bad and back again, depending on that person's physical and emotional state. He concluded that vision is not a static condition, but one that changes constantly. In your own experience, you've probably noticed that your vision is better at some times than at others. Dr. Bates was the first ophthalmologist to make a scientific study of this phenomenon. His research shows how vision defects can be created and/or worsened by the stress of everyday situations. He also proved that these problems can be corrected by conscious and correct visual behavior.

Dr. Bates died in 1931, having spent his life researching and developing a method to relieve the unnecessary suffering of people afflicted with eye disorders. His compassion and concern for his patients was legendary. Upon seeing an infant fitted with tiny glasses, Dr. Bates remarked, "It's enough to make the angels weep."

The exercises on *Yoga for Your Eyes* are based on the Bates Method, with refinements and additions developed during my nearly three decades of reversing my own blindness and helping others work with their visual problems. These methods have been proven

effective in relieving all refractive conditions (any structural problem affecting the trajectory of light within the eye), correcting squints and lazy eyes, and similar problems. They do not necessarily address eye diseases; but they do help you nurture healthier eyes that are more resistant to disease and better able to heal themselves from any reversible condition.

THE BODYMIND CONNECTION

The British writer Aldous Huxley was a successful student and enthusiastic admirer of Dr. Bates' method. After using his exercises to recover from a condition of near-blindness, Huxley wrote a book called *The Art of Seeing*, in which he described seeing as a three-step process involving the eyes, the brain, and the mind. He explained that seeing consists of:

Sensing - the light-sensitive cells of the eyes receive information about their environment via light rays — approximately one billion bits of visual data during any given second.

Selecting — the mind cannot deal with all of the visual data being conveyed to the eyes, so it directs the eyes to pay attention only to certain data.

Perceiving - the selected visual data are recognized and interpreted by the mind.

Visual improvement requires that we recognize vision as a complex interaction between the eyes and the mind. We also need to learn how to make the mind work for us, rather than against us. One of the biggest obstacles we need to overcome is the belief that the eyes can never improve. This belief can keep us from recognizing or accepting improvement when it does occur, or convince us that in certain situations we simply will not be able to see and therefore should not try.

Sometimes our vision may worsen when we expect it to, in situations where we feel our eyes are being challenged. Dr. Bates described a situation in which he had two of his patients, one with excellent vision and the other with poor vision, look at a blank wall. During this experiment, he monitored changes in the surface curvature of their eyes with his retinoscope. As long as both patients looked at the blank wall, their eyes remained the same. As soon as he placed an eye chart on the wall, the eyes of the person with poor vision changed radically, with all the surrounding muscles contracting sharply. The eyes of the person with good vision showed only a slight, barely noticeable change. The first one had immediately and unconsciously brought his habits of straining into his effort to see the chart.

To improve vision, you need to change the way you think about seeing, as well as the way you go about seeing. This is a large undertaking. Visual habits and patterns of use are among the hardest to change; we are more attached to the way we see than to almost anything else we do. Perhaps this is because our memory consists so much of visual information. Once we have seen something in a certain way, we remember it that way and continue to see it as we remember it. Our dependence on sight is enormous, especially in people who see well. When these people lose their good vision, it can be really traumatic, changing their entire self-concept. In reality, such people have great resources to help them restore their vision: namely, their memories of clear, sharp visual images.

Memory and imagination are the mind's most valuable tools for improving vision, and you will find them used in many of the exercises on *Yoga for Your Eyes*. Anything we have ever seen clearly can be used to stimulate clearer vision. We all know that it is easier to see things that are known and familiar. For

example, an unfamiliar word, though it is made up of the same letters, will initially be harder to decipher than a familiar one. We use visualization exercises to take advantage of the mind's tendency to associate clear vision with that which is known and familiar. We also use visualization or imagination to create optimal conditions. Imagining total blackness, for example, can cause the optic nerve to react as though it were, in fact, seeing total blackness — that is, to stop working and rest.

The mind, like any other powerful force of nature, can either help or harm. It can keep us from believing that our vision can improve, or it can supply us with everything we need to improve it.

YOUR EYES AND YOUR BRAIN

The most important visual organ is the brain. The eyes and the brain even share the same kinds of tissue. Our sensitive eyes respond to the minutest chemical changes in the brain — including those caused by emotional states and mental events. Theories that blame eye structure as the origin of our visual problems are very limited, in that they do not recognize the profound bodymind dynamics that cause the structural changes to begin with. Conventional ophthalmology holds that structure creates function; this is why poor vision is typically treated with instruments or surgeries designed to change the structure of the eye. But the truth is that all vision begins with thought. Your thoughts dictate how your eyes function, and the way your eyes function changes their structure. If you learn to function differently with your mind, you may also change the structure of your eye.

The extent of your brain's control over visual function is evident in the way it makes sense of

impressions that your eyes alone cannot interpret. For example: physics teaches that, although you perceive objects as right side up, your lens and retina are seeing them upside down. Your eyes have no mechanical function that translates the upside-down images into the perspective you normally see. It is your brain that needs to put everything right side up, to create order in the world. A startling experiment illuminates this point quite vividly.

A group of pilots was given glasses that made everything appear upside down. Within a couple of days, their brains righted their vision and they saw everything right side up again, even through their glasses. Two weeks later, the glasses were taken away. Everything turned upside down. Some of the pilots actually suffered nervous breakdowns; but with time, they all saw things right side up again without the glasses.

The vast extent to which vision is a mental state is the territory Western medicine does not address. Symptomatic solutions — surgery, glasses, and so on — do help you see better in the short term; but ultimately, they make your eyes weaker. Meanwhile, these remedies perpetuate the myth of helplessness that keeps you from strengthening your vision through self-care — an approach that has not only been effective for many thousands of people, but is far preferable in terms of both visual function and self-empowerment.

YOUR EYES AND YOUR EMOTIONS

Vision is also very much an emotional state. Almost every client I have worked with has experienced strong emotions — and sometimes powerful emotional insights — while working to improve their vision. Conversely, strong negative emotions nearly always worsen vision temporarily. This is true even for people

with good eyesight. If the emotional stress continues, damage to the eyes can become permanent.

Much visual deterioration is due to an unwillingness to observe the world closely. Our eyes lose their ability to “shift” from one detail to another, resulting in a frozen stare that stresses our eyes tremendously. Yet when we are under emotional stress, the last thing we want to do is look at the details of our situation. It is less painful, at times like this, to partially “blind” ourselves to the reality of our experience. Our vision becomes fuzzy in an attempt to protect us emotionally. Unfortunately, our typical reaction to this situation is to force our eyes to perform as usual. We acquire glasses, or get a stronger prescription.

If you strained your back by using it to lift heavy objects, you would not think of just getting a back brace and continuing to use your spine in the same way. Yet this is precisely how we treat our eyes. It would be much better for your long-term visual health if you simply acknowledged your need to see less clearly for a while. This is a time to rest and support your eyes, your body, and your mind. In a world dedicated to functionality, this might be difficult to do - yet to ignore physical and emotional distress signals is to risk permanent damage to your ability to function. If you nurture your eyesight through the hard times, it will return to its previous capacity when things start (literally) looking up again.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF YOGA FOR YOUR EYES

Our primitive ancestors used all their senses — including their vision - fully. They looked into the distance; they noticed the slightest movement at the far periphery of their vision. Their eyes shifted constantly

from detail to detail, from close up to far away. They could find their way both in the dark and in the full light of day.

Sadly, our reality today is not nearly so fluid. Life hardens our bodies. When we work hard, we tense our posture and contract. When we read or work at the computer, the rest of the room is of no interest to us. We spend most of our days staring at work just a few inches from our noses. Daylight blinds us when we step outdoors after working inside all day; we find ourselves straining to see in the dark.

These bad visual habits lead to a “frozen” look: a gaze that basically discounts much of the visual field. We do not use the larger portion of the visual capacity and acuity naturally available to us - and in time, the brain reinforces this behavior and fixates the eye around it. In this way, it creates a predictable reality in which we expect to see only certain things and only in certain ways. It imposes its visual memory to recreate our visual experiences in the moment.

On *Yoga for Your Eyes*, you will learn how to develop what I call “soft eyes”: eyes that are truly open to whatever there is to see. The concept of soft eyes was developed by martial arts practitioners to describe the kind of vision necessary in order to be aware of three opponents coming at you from different directions. With a frozen gaze, you would only be able to focus on one at a time, which would lead very quickly to your defeat.

By contrast, soft eyes have great presence. They take in the whole room, the whole landscape, without straining for any particular visual impression. Looking with soft eyes is similar to taking a walk for the pure pleasure of moving your body, without scheming over the calories you are burning or the muscles you are toning. Soft eyes absorb the world, rather than trying to capture it; your eyes rest while

you look, rather than striving. With soft eyes, the process of looking is as important as the content of what is seen. Obviously, this is a much more relaxed approach to living than the one most of us are used to.

UNION WITH YOUR EYES

“Yoga” is a Sanskrit word that literally means “yoke”: the device that harnesses an ox to a wagon. It was originally used in Hindu tradition to describe the harnessing of self with the divine. In contemporary usage, we translate “yoga” as “union” — in other words, an attitude of joining with our experience, rather than trying to separate ourselves from it. Often, we try to distance ourselves from our world by numbing ourselves, pushing away our feelings, or trying to freeze time so that we do not have to deal with the possibility of distressing changes. “Yoga for your eyes” means uniting with your eyes: being present with them, exactly the way they are.

When we unite with our eyes, we set aside our preconceptions and become curious about their true experience. We begin to pay attention to them, noticing when they are tired or irritated. As we would with any good friend, we attend to their needs: resting them when they have been working hard and gently exercising them when they become weak or damaged.

All the exercises on *Yoga for Your Eyes* are based on these principles. So are the following guidelines, with which you should work whenever you exercise and throughout the day. Practice these suggestions, and you will find that your eyes are surprisingly responsive to your nurturing attention. Never, under any circumstances, strain to see anything. It is impossible to force better vision - in fact, trying to do so will reverse all the benefit you derive from these exercises.

Instead, notice what you do see and use that information to enhance your exercises.

- Let your vision be what it is. If it is blurred, do not try to make it clear. Simply work with what you have and notice what mental, physical, and emotional conditions contribute to changes in your eyesight. (You do not have to change these conditions, by the way; just being aware of them will start a natural process of change.)
- Do not force yourself to do any exercise that feels uncomfortable to you. Discuss any qualms you may have with your ophthalmologist, and use your own judgment and intuition to personalize the program for your unique needs.
- Goals are a setup for disappointment and frustration. Imposing a schedule on your visual improvement is counterproductive. Discover your own pace and respect it; this is truly the fastest way to improve your eyesight.
- Remember that your eyes are not isolated from the rest of your body. If your back hurts, or your neck is tense, or you do not eat well, your eyes will respond to these stresses by losing function. Make *Yoga for Your Eyes* part of an overall program for nurturing your body, mind, and spirit.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF YOGA FOR YOUR EYES

There are many ways you can work on your eyes. Some techniques concentrate specifically on a particular aspect of visual function; others on the health of your eyes; and still others on your overall well-being. Ideally, your daily workout will touch on all these elements - but in order to understand the

program more clearly, we can group all the exercises into three basic categories:

- relaxation
- adjusting to varying intensities of light
- balancing your eyes

Relaxation

The eye is one of the hardest-working organs in the body, and people who use their eyes a lot become fatigued more rapidly than others. This partially explains why a typist can be as exhausted as a lumberjack at the end of a workday. We use our eyes every minute we are awake — typically, about seventeen hours daily.

Imagine how your muscles would feel if you used them nonstop, every waking moment. If you work, as many of us do, at a job that requires constant and strenuous use of your eyes, consider how your body would feel if you forced it to walk all day, every day, under the weight of a heavy burden. This is the kind of pressure we put on our eyes.

You might feel that you relax your eyes for many hours each day, while you sleep. The fact is that during much of our sleep time, our eyes are not resting enough. During dreams, the optic nerve is stimulated and the eyes are in motion under our closed eyelids. It has been clearly established that all humans spend several hours a night in this state. In addition, many people do not relax during sleep, but maintain their tensions — particularly in the upper body and face.

Ideally, you should be able to improve your vision through both use and rest. Everything you do with your eyes should be good for them. One of the most important things you can do for them is simply to

counteract the abuse to which they are typically subjected. The most effective way to accomplish this is through relaxation.

Your eyes are an integral part of your body. It is unrealistic to think you can relax them when the rest of your body is tense. This is why *Yoga for Your Eyes* begins with self-massage and other relaxation techniques.

Adjusting to Light

Light is the vehicle that brings all visual information to your eyes. People who spend much of their time working outdoors under bright, natural light tend to have better eyesight than those of us who live mostly indoors, because their eyes are accustomed to - and comfortable with - strong light. They can accept and use the light fully. The more time we spend under dim, inadequate, artificial lighting, the less our eyes are equipped to deal with light. Normal sunlight can feel like a spotlight shone into your face.

This is partly because spending most of your time indoors forces your pupils to chronically dilate, opening as wide as possible in order to take in all available light. The muscles around your eyes will tend to tighten, squinting to shut out the painful glare. Many people are currently walking around with sunglasses or with a perpetual, unconscious squint shielding their eyes from “excess” light.

To some extent, squinting works temporarily. Its long-term effects, however, are very detrimental to vision. It causes the muscles around the eyes to constantly contract, which changes the shape of the eyeball. It also cuts out a large part of the peripheral visual field, forcing the eyes to stare fixedly, with effort, at a very small area. Sunglasses are about as helpful, in this situation, as a wheelchair to a person with weak leg muscles: they provide temporary relief,

but ultimately serve only to further weaken the eyes' ability to cope with light.

Of course, I am not suggesting that you get rid of your sunglasses forever. You may still need them if you happen to be driving due west at sunset. But if you regularly practice *Yoga for Your Eyes*, you will need them less and less. Your eyes will accept much more light, much more comfortably. Your pupils will become more flexible, able to dilate and contract easily and quickly, making the transition from dark to light less painful. Your face will lose its squint, and your visual field will expand. You will no longer be blinded by the light of day.

Balancing Your Eyes

People with poor vision commonly do two things that lead to unbalanced use of the eyes: they allow one eye to dominate, and they use only their central vision while neglecting their peripheral vision. This behavior is, of course, completely unconscious - but it can be changed by conscious retraining.

Most of us tend to have a stronger eye. People with myopia know about this phenomenon, because their prescription is typically stronger for one eye than for the other. When one eye tends to dominate, the result is exactly the same as when we use only a few muscles to do the work of the entire body. The weaker eye is underused, and consequently weakens further, while the stronger eye works ceaselessly until it, too, begins to lose its strength.

Stimulating peripheral vision is intimately connected with balancing your stronger and weaker eyes. When we look straight forward with both eyes, it is easy to unconsciously let one eye do all the work. When we work with our periphery, however, we create a separate visual field for each eye, and so are much more apt to notice if one eye is not working.

Exercising the periphery also helps to break the bad habits you may have established in overusing your central vision. One more excellent reason to stimulate peripheral vision is that it tends to improve night vision - the same cells of the retina are involved.

Contemporary optometry accepts just seventy percent of peripheral vision as normal — in other words, most of us are missing thirty percent of our available usage. The ancient Romans were entertained in amphitheaters, where their attention was attracted to objects at many points in a wide visual field. Today, our entertainment mostly requires us to look straight ahead: at television, a movie screen, or a stage. Overuse of our central vision causes ocular hypertension: fluid comes into the eye faster than it can drain, slowly building up pressure on the optic nerve. Another name for this condition is glaucoma.

CAUTIONS: PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR EXERCISES

If you follow the *Yoga for Your Eyes* program as set out in this video and booklet, there is no downside. These practices produce no side effects or added stress to other parts of your bodymind. There are, however, some cautions you must observe in order to protect your eyes while exercising. If you ignore the cautions listed below, you will miss the full benefits of the program. In some cases, you could actually cause real damage. Please take a moment to read this section each time you begin your exercise routine, at least for the first few days. As your eyes begin to feel comfortable with these new activities, your awareness will naturally keep you from employing counter-productive and dangerous practices.

- Please remove your glasses, sunglasses, or contact lenses while doing any of the exercises in this program.
- If you wear glasses or contact lenses, do not expect to throw them away in the next few days. In time, you may well find that you need a weaker prescription, or possibly no longer need your prescribed lenses at all; still, using them is preferable to squinting and straining in order to work or read. If your driver's license requires you to wear glasses, continue to do so until you can pass the vision test at the DMV. Otherwise, experiment with using and not using your glasses or lenses as you proceed with the program. Let your guiding principle be how much you are able to keep your eyes relaxed in various situations. The more you learn to see adequately with relaxed eyes, the less you will need to use "corrective" lenses.
- The "sunning" exercise you'll learn on *Yoga for Your Eyes* requires you to turn your face toward the sun. Always keep your eyes gently shut while practicing this exercise. Not even the healthiest eyes are equipped to tolerate light that bright. The purpose of sunning is to train your pupils to adapt readily to natural extremes of light and dark. Keep rotating your head or upper body continually through an entire 180 degrees while sunning to prevent retinal damage.
- Never sun through glass — either lenses or a window. Any type of glass intensifies the sun's rays, which can damage your eyes.
- If, while sunning, you began to feel headachy, nauseated, and/or dizzy, stop immediately and get out of the sun — it may be too bright for you, or you may be dehydrating.

- If you suffer from glaucoma, restrict the “palming” exercise to four or five minutes or you may increase pressure in your eyes. You can, however, palm briefly numerous times throughout the day.
- Please understand that the techniques you are learning are not mechanical exercises to be engaged in while your thoughts are elsewhere. This is bodymind work that will create profound changes in your visual habits — how you look at your world altogether. Pay attention to how your eyes feel as you practice. It is important to do the exercises mindfully, so that you can slowly develop a sense of what your eyes need at any given moment.

RELAXING YOUR BODY

It is impossible to relax one part of your body - your eyes, for example — if other parts of your body are tense. Therefore, it is essential to begin each *Yoga for Your Eyes* session with some elementary relaxation exercises.

During all of the exercises described in this program, you should breathe slowly and deeply, through your nose. This action helps to relax you both physically and mentally, while also enriching your blood with the oxygen your eyes need to function at their best.

First, interlace your fingers, palms toward you. Now move your arms in a large circle, reaching as far as you can without straining. Do a few circles clockwise and another few counterclockwise.

Stand facing a wall and extend your arms so that your elbows are locked in a straight position and the palms of your hands are flat against the wall. Leaning against the wall in this way, move your chest backward and forward ten to fifteen times. Your elbows should remain straight. Be sure that your

chest - not your abdomen, shoulders, or neck - is leading the motion. During the exercise, your chest will alternate between three distinct positions: convex (puffed out); neutral; and concave (caved in). Take the time to feel all three positions, moving your head slowly from side to side in each position.

Now take your hands from the wall and interlace your fingers again, this time with your palms facing outward. Repeat the circling motions you did previously.

SELF-MASSAGE

Massage should be a part of your daily self-care for the eyes. It is especially helpful about midway through your eye exercise session — you will find that you get much better results in the second half of the session, after the massage. Massage creates a sense of ease about seeing and increases circulation to your eyes. These instructions are for self-massage, but supplementing it with professional massage therapy is even better. Show these instructions to your massage therapist.

Do as many of the following exercises as you can when preparing for a session of vision exercises. Working on your vision demands a high level of awareness, and it will be enormously helpful to you if you begin your work in a state of attunement with your body.

Guidelines

- Remove glasses and contact lenses.
- Throughout the massage, breathe deeply and slowly, in and out, through your nose.
- Use both hands.
- Begin by rubbing your hands together to warm the fingers.

- Make sure your wrists remain loose.
- During massage, your touch should be light, but visualize that your fingers are penetrating deeply.

Facial Massage

Ideally, you should massage your face alone for at least thirty minutes. Massaging your whole face influences the circulation around your eyes.

Rub your hands together until they are warm, and then massage your face with your fingertips — gently at first, and then more firmly as your muscles also begin to warm up. Initially, the pressure should be just firm enough to let you feel whether a spot is tense or painful, but not so hard that it makes the pain worse. Spend at least a couple of minutes on each separate area, noticing how your touch feels and what effect it has. You may experience a deep tension or pain, a superficial tightness, a pleasant sense of release, or numbness (which is also a sensation).

Begin with your jaw. Massage the whole area from the point of the chin outward along the jawbone, in front of and behind the ears. You can open and close your jaws while doing this, to help stretch and relax the strong jaw muscles. This may make you feel like yawning, so go ahead and yawn; it is very relaxing for your face. Massage your entire face, using one hand on either side and making large strokes from the midline outward.

Now work up from the bridge of your nose outward along the cheekbones, toward the temples. Stroke all the way along your cheekbones, from nose to ears. Feel the muscles in the area loosening under your fingers. Find sore spots by feeling for the grooves. Massage the sore spots, making circular movements with your fingertips and applying a little more pressure.



From the bridge of the nose, work out along your eyebrows, massaging above, below, and directly on the brow. As you stroke, stretch the skin and underlying muscle very lightly. As you return to this stroking from time to time throughout your facial massage, gradually increase the amount of stretch. Perform at least twenty strokes above the eyebrows and twenty on them. Avoid stroking below the eyebrow ridge.

Again, feel for grooves in your eyebrows while massaging. Muscular tension will feel like hard, stringy, or fibrous spots under your fingers. Massage these spots, making small circles with your fingertips. Sore spots are often found in the eyebrow area when there is eyestrain related to myopia, glaucoma, or retinal problems. They may occur above the bridge of the nose when one eye is dominant.

Spend a little extra time on the point between your eyebrows; this area gathers a lot of tension from the act of seeing. Then massage in long, firm strokes



across your forehead and, very gently, with small circular motions, in the temple area (be careful not to press hard here). Stroke lightly from the temples up into your scalp, imagining that you are drawing tension away from your eyes.

Finally, massage your entire scalp, making large circular motions with your whole hand and then with your fingertips. Pinch a fold of skin on the scalp, starting where it feels loosest, and try rolling it along. You can be vigorous with this massage. Try to feel that you are separating the scalp from the skull. Grasp your hair and pull it gently. Fan your hair out and let it fall from your hands.

RELAXING YOUR NECK, HEAD, AND SHOULDERS

It is preferable if you can lie down to do these next exercises — your body relaxes much more when it is not opposing the pull of gravity. Otherwise, you can do them sitting or standing.

Close your eyes and let your face go slack - especially around the jaw, which tends to tense automatically with deep concentration. Turn your head to the side and feel gently with your fingertips along the side of your neck. The sternocleidomastoid muscle runs from underneath your ear down along the side of the neck and into the breastbone and collarbone. This muscle bears much of the burden for supporting the head; relaxing its tension is vital to the health of your eyes. The sternocleidomastoid can become tighter than just about any other muscle in the body (some people have mistaken it for a bone when touching it), so give it a lot of special attention.

Massage all along the length of this muscle, trying to follow the path of tension. Palpate, tap, and stroke it - gently at first, and then more firmly as it begins to soften. You will probably find several very sore or tight spots. Do not dig at them, because they are probably so sore that they will only resist deep massage. Instead, work gently on them and more firmly around them. Now turn your head from side to side and see whether you notice a difference between the two sides. Note this difference and then massage the other side.

Imagine that someone is holding your head and moving it for you, so that it rolls very slowly and gently from side to side. Let it roll far enough to each side that you feel the stretch in the side neck muscles, jaw, and shoulders. After doing this until your neck begins to relax, begin slowly to open your mouth. Let it stretch as far as it can without strain, and then let it fall closed as you continue to roll your head from side to side. Pay attention to which muscles are moved by this exercise: where, besides the jaw, can you feel the stretch?

As you continue to roll your head and open and close your mouth, add a steady, rhythmic blinking.

This is also a great coordination exercise, because you will have your head, jaw, and eyelids all moving at the same time, but at slightly different speeds. If you find this difficult, concentrate not on the difficulty, but on the different sensations that each part is experiencing as it moves. Do this for several minutes and see whether you experience a sense of relief from facial and eye tension. If not, see whether you at least experience the tension itself. Many people carry this tension all the time and never really feel it. Nonetheless, it may eventually result in deteriorated eyesight.

When you have released some of the tension in your neck muscles, you are ready to do some head rotations. It is important to relax the neck first, as moving your head in this way with a tight neck can make you dizzy or nauseated. Rotate your head slowly, making relatively small circles. If you are doing this movement lying down, you do not have to lift your head to make a full rotation. Imagine that you are drawing a circle with your chin or nose; this will produce the correct motion.

You may be tempted to begin with huge, sweeping circles, trying to shake out the tension you feel in your neck and shoulders. The problem with this is that your body, when it feels that tension, interprets the movement as stress and resists it; so begin with small circles.

Touch the highest vertebra you can reach, where your skull and neck are joined, and imagine this as the center of the circle your head is making. This gentle motion not only relaxes your neck muscles but also releases tension in your spinal joints, making movement of the neck more easy and fluid. Make at least one hundred of these slow, small rotations, and do not forget to change direction from clockwise to counterclockwise after every ten or fifteen circles.

Finish up your relaxation session with some shoulder rotations. These are wonderful for releasing shoulder and upper-back tension, since they work directly on the shoulder muscles. If you have ever had these muscles massaged, you know how tight they can get. Rotate your shoulders from front to back, and then from back to front.

After ten minutes or so of massage, your face will be glowing and tingling from the increased blood flow. Now you can begin working with the eyes themselves.

EYE EXERCISES

BALANCING THE MUSCLES AROUND YOUR EYES

The first technique is designed to increase the flexibility and strength of the muscles around your eyes, and teach them to move with equal ease in all directions.

Begin by moving both eyes simultaneously in small circles. If you find this difficult to do, you can hold up a finger in front of your eyes and move it in a circle, allowing the eye to follow it; it is preferable, however, to rotate your eyes without this aid. Also move your eyes from side to side and up and down. If you find any position especially difficult, work gently with it by moving your eyes from side to side (or up and down) from that position.

Touch your forehead above the eyes with your fingertips. Can you feel the muscles moving? They do not need to. Try to relax them, and practice this exercise until you can do it without working the forehead muscles. You may simply need to make your circles smaller; in fact, see how small you can make them.

Now close your eyes and visualize them moving in circles, freely, with no effort. It may help to picture a wheel rolling, or a record on a turntable. Open your eyes and rotate them again, this time imagining that only the pupils are rotating.

Next, close your eyes and move them in rotation under the closed lids. This may be more difficult, since the movement is so much more limited. Touch your eyelids lightly as you do this, feeling the movement beneath them. Notice whether you tense the rest of your face during this motion; if so, try not to. You will find it much easier to do this exercise with your eyes open after this.

PALMING

This supremely important exercise creates the relaxation that amplifies the effects of all the other exercises. It will

- rest the optic nerve
- relax your nervous system
- bring more circulation to your eyes

The passive rest your eyes experience while you sleep is not enough to thoroughly relax them. Your eyes need the conscious, active relaxation that comes with palming. It is impossible to palm too many times or for too long - unless you have glaucoma or elevated pressure in the eyes (see "Cautions," page 19). Otherwise, palm for at least fifteen to thirty minutes, several times a day.

Remove watches and jewelry from your hands and wrists. Darken the room and sit at a table with a cushion on it. If you prefer, you can sit on the floor with your back against a wall and your elbows resting on your knees. It is also acceptable to lie down on



your side, with your head and lower hand on a pillow. Support the other elbow with another pillow. The point is to be able to hold your hands to your eyes without straining any part of your body and without putting pressure on your eyes and face.

Warm your hands by rubbing them together, or on your chest, abdomen, or thighs. Drop your shoulders and relax them by wiggling them for a moment. Close your eyes. Lightly rest the heels of your hands on your cheekbones and cover your eyes with the palms of your hands. Your hands should not actually be touching your eyes.

Now start to imagine an ever-deepening blackness. Actually, you will be able to visualize blackness only if the optic nerve is relaxed. As you progress with palming, you will get closer to this goal. Intend to see blackness, and fully accept whatever you get. Please do not try hard. It is counterproductive to put strain and effort into palming.

Visualize that everything is slowly turning black. If you wish, you can start with yourself. (If, for any reason, you are uncomfortable with the color black, replace it in the following exercise with “dark,” “darkness,” or “midnight blue.”) Relax into the meditation, enjoy giving free rein to your imagination, and notice how you feel. You may choose to

imagine that your eyes are black; that your head is black. So is your neck; your chest; your abdomen; your thighs; your knees; your calves; your feet. All the objects in the room are turning black. The room is black. The blackness is expanding beyond your room, into your building, beyond that, farther and farther outward. The world is turning black. Feel free to create your own images of blackness. Have fun with it.

At the same time, feel your breathing. Breathe deeply, slowly, and evenly through your nose. The slower you breathe, the better. While allowing everything to be black, feel your abdomen and back expand as you inhale and shrink as you exhale. Your exhalation should be slower than your inhalation. Visualize that your eyes feel relaxed. Feel your chest, mid-back, and ribs expand and shrink as you breathe. Then feel your neck expanding and shrinking with your breathing. (There is a gray area between sensation and visualization - just relax into it and do not worry whether your neck is “really” expanding and shrinking.)

Visualize/feel that your head is slowly expanding and shrinking. There is a slow, rhythmical movement of the bones of your skull as they move with your breathing. Continue to breathe deeply, softly, pleasurablely. Visualize that your pelvis is expanding and shrinking with your breathing; then your thighs; then your knees. Soon what you imagine and what you feel will become one and the same. Visualize that your fingers and toes are expanding and shrinking with your breathing. Notice how relaxed all these areas that you have breathed into are feeling now.

Now, while continuing to feel your breath throughout your body, slowly begin to take away the blackness from the world outside, from your room, from your feet on up through your body. All of your body is still expanding and shrinking with your

breathing. Remove your hands from your eyes and start to blink gently. If your eyes are watering, that is a good sign. Eyestrain tends to produce dryness.

While palming, you may experience some of the painful, chronic eyestrain you have been shutting out. If you do, stay with it until it passes.

The results of palming differ widely from individual to individual. However much or little tension you have been able to release, you have made a very promising start to a lifetime of healthier eyes.

Emotional Effects of Palming

You may experience a strong emotional resistance to palming, particularly if you palm and meditate at the same time. This is part of an overall resistance to relaxation that anxiety creates in many people. It is as though we believe that, if we let down our guard for a moment, disaster will strike from some unexpected quarter — and so we remain always on edge: afraid of the dark, perhaps, or restless with being ourselves. The feeling may be so deeply ingrained that you cannot always overcome it just through soothing thoughts or affirmations.

If you find yourself overwhelmed by negative emotion, the best thing to do is a meditative breathing exercise. This consists of ten deep breaths, drawn (as always) through your nose and deep into your abdomen. While you do this, give yourself permission to be exactly as you are. For these ten breaths, tell yourself that it is okay to be anxious, angry, or impatient; it is okay to have blurred vision. Tell yourself that whatever you think is wrong with you is not wrong; it just is. And then go on palming. Another very effective solution is to have someone who cares about you massage you while you palm, especially when you start practicing the three-day guided palming meditation (see Appendix A, page 58).

How Often Should I Palm?

Five-minute palming sessions are fine for resting your eyes when taking a break from your work or reading. Otherwise, you should palm for a minimum of twenty minutes at a time — and, if possible, for three-quarters of an hour to an hour per day, either in one sitting or divided among a few. It usually takes about fifteen minutes to rest the eyes fully, and you should have at least a few minutes - more, naturally, is better - to stay in that relaxed state and enjoy it. If you feel your vision problem is more serious, spend more time palming.

Do not schedule a long palming session just before you are about to rush off on a million errands, because the chances are that you will not let yourself relax fully; nor is it wise to palm when you are extremely tired, unless your goal is to fall asleep immediately. Try to find a “between time,” when you are neither exhausted nor anxious to get on to the next thing. Set aside a special time for palming, and congratulate yourself if you go over the allotted time - it is a measure of how much you have been able to relax.

BLINKING

This simple but powerful exercise

- bathes and massages your eyes
- rests them from the work of focusing for near vision
- relieves tension around your eyes
- dismantles the harmful habit of staring

Most people with bad eyesight have lost the ability to blink easily and often. When you see someone wearing thick glasses, you will notice that they tend



to stare without blinking. They probably also frown and squint with effort. Dr. Bates said that you can either squint or see well, but you cannot do both. This blinking exercise will help relax your squint and free your gaze to move fluidly from one object to another without freezing.

Breathe deeply. Begin slowly, gently opening and closing your eyes. Feel your forehead to make sure it is not frowning. If your forehead does not move, it means that your blinking is relaxed. Consult a mirror to make sure that you open and close your eyes fully with each blink — or check with a partner who is doing the eye exercises with you.

Close your right eye and cover it with your right hand. Your fingers should be gently touching the closed eyelid. Begin slowly blinking your left eye. Imagine that the eyelashes are moving the eyelid up and down, with the eyelid merely an idle passenger; or picture someone gently raising the eyelid for you with a finger held under the eyelashes, then releasing it so that gravity can pull it gradually down again. Brush the eyelashes of your left eye with the fingers of your left hand to reinforce the sense that they, and not your forehead, are doing the work.

Massage your forehead over the left eye with the fingers of your left hand. Start with your fingertips touching your thumb and then open them, smoothing your forehead with thumb and fingertips as they move away from each other.

Try blinking so gently that the fingers of your right hand feel no movement in the right eyelid. This may take some time to accomplish; but the more you practice with this intention, the more both eyes will relax.

Now repeat the exercise, covering your left eye and blinking with your right eye.

As with all the other exercises on *Yoga for Your Eyes*, blinking should be done with awareness and without strain. In addition to following the structured exercise above several times daily, you should also blink frequently throughout your waking hours. Try to let your blinking be effortless, frequent but not too rapid, complete but not forced.

Try blinking instead of squinting when your eyes feel overwhelmed by bright light, since squinting not only tightens the muscles around the eyes but also focuses light on the eyes in a painful and harmful way. Remember especially to blink frequently when you are doing a lot of looking, as when driving or working at a computer.

TESTING YOUR VISION

Your progress with *Yoga for Your Eyes* depends entirely on your own efforts and observations. There is no outside “expert” empowered to measure your progress and pronounce whether your condition is improving, and by how much. It is up to you to mark your starting point - much as a parent might mark a child’s height on a doorjamb - and then to return from time to time to measure your improvement against that first mark.

The traditional way to test vision is with an eye chart, such as the Snellen Eye Chart included with *Yoga for Your Eyes*. For those of us who have spent more than our fair share of time in ophthalmologists' offices, however, the very sight of a regular eye chart can be stressful enough to freeze our eyes in panic. If this sounds familiar, create your own chart. Use drawings, pictures cut out of magazines, dried flowers, or symbols that have special meaning for you. The only requirement is that, as in a traditional eye chart, you make all the items in the top row the same size; then create a second row of smaller items - again, all of the same size; and so on, each row getting progressively smaller until you have six lines.

Hang your chart several feet away from you, at a distance where you can read one to three lines easily and have difficulty with the rest. The chart should be vertical (e.g., on a wall, rather than angled on a chair or easel), at a comfortable eye level for you, either standing or sitting. Begin "reading" your chart at the top line. Make a note of the last line you can see clearly.

This is the yardstick against which you will measure your progress as you continue to practice *Yoga for Your Eyes*. After each exercise — or at least after each session — return to your chart, standing the same distance away from it, to check for changes.

STIMULATING PERIPHERAL VISION

Most of us overuse our central vision. This leads to weakening of the macula: the area near the center of your retina where detailed vision is available. Intense use of your central vision can create deep tension in facial muscles, especially those of the forehead and jaw. Peripheral work can relieve this strain.

The following exercises involve blocking your central field of vision and stimulating the periphery

of each eye, either simultaneously or consecutively. To do this, you will need the small black rectangles included with this video package. If you should lose them, simply make your own by cutting out three small pieces of black construction paper, all two inches in height. One should be one and a half inches in width; one three inches; and the largest, five inches wide. Use a piece of double-backed adhesive tape, or regular adhesive tape doubled over, to stick the rectangle to the very top of the bridge of your nose.

Tape the smallest rectangle between your eyes. Sit and turn your head slowly from side to side. Look straight ahead at the paper while waving your hands or wiggling your fingers on both sides of your head, close to your ears. This movement stimulates your peripheral cells.

Now close your eyes and visualize your hands waving and the room swiveling slowly from side to side, as it appeared to do a moment ago. Try to imagine that it is indeed the room, rather than your head, that moves.

Open your eyes and repeat the first part of the exercise. Vary the movement of your hands, moving them in circles, up and down, and out to the sides. Keep imagining that your peripheral field is expand-



ing. To make sure you are using both eyes equally, always remember to pay conscious attention to what each eye is seeing. Occasionally close your eyes and visualize that both of them see fully and clearly in the periphery.

Remove the rectangle from between your eyes, cover your right eye with your right hand, and, as you look forward, stimulate the periphery of your left eye by wiggling your fingers all around your visual field. (The periphery of your left eye is not just to your left, but also above and below your face and to your right.) Repeat with the other eye.

Tape the smallest rectangle between your eyes again. Now move your head slowly up and down, imagining as you do so that the room, not your head, is moving, and that it is moving opposite to your own movement. Thus, as your head moves downward, imagine that the room is moving upward; and as your head comes up again, imagine that the room is moving down. Do the same while bending your whole upper body up and down.

Repeat these exercises with the midsized rectangle; then with the largest rectangle; then with the midsized rectangle again. Finally, repeat the exercises using the smallest rectangle. You will probably find, after this sequence, that your periphery has enlarged — and thus the smallest rectangle seems smaller than when you first used it.

As long as you are not the driver, you can turn a car ride into a vision exercise by taping a rectangle of black paper on the bridge of your nose. Look straight ahead at it; your brain will quickly tire of the black paper, and will begin paying more attention to the moving scenery on both sides. If you are on a train, try sitting so that you are facing the opposite direction to the one in which the train is moving. This will make you even more aware of the movement.

The Long Swing

The purpose of this exercise is to increase the sense of movement while you are engaged in the act of looking. Practiced regularly, the long swing will

- break up the habit of straining to see
- stimulate peripheral vision
- integrate the field of vision (especially helpful for people with low visual capability)

Stand with your legs wider than hip width, about two feet apart. Hold up a finger about ten inches in front of your nose and look at it. Keep looking at your finger while moving it as far to each side as you can, turning your head so that your finger is always in front of your nose. As you look at your moving finger, notice that everything seems to move in the opposite direction, as if you were looking out of a moving train. From time to time, stop the active exercise, close your eyes, and visualize what you just saw: your finger moving in one direction and everything else moving in the opposite direction. Then resume the active exercise.

Now move your whole torso along with your head, swaying your trunk far enough in each direction that the heel of the opposite foot lifts off the ground.

Hold your finger horizontally rather than vertically and move it up and down, following it with your eyes and your head, just as you did in the vertical direction. As you move your face up, everything seems to move downward, etc. Keep moving up and down, breathing deeply and slowly, and blinking.

Now combine the horizontal and vertical long swings into a U-shaped long swing (it is a nice workout!). Hold your finger vertically again. Always looking at the finger and keeping it in front of your nose, stretch tall as you pivot to the left, swoop down

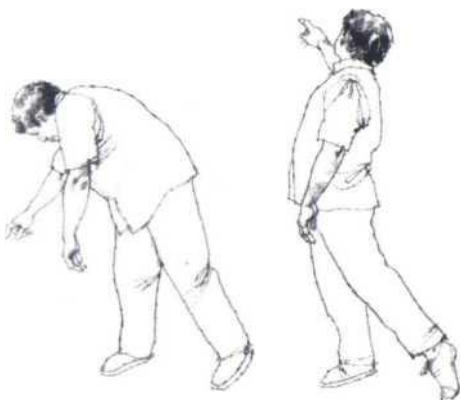


into a forward bend in the middle of your arc, and then stretch tall again as you pivot to the right. (Some people like to change the fingers at the midpoint. Try both ways, and use whatever method works best for you.) You may even want to throw your head back and arch your back a little at the left and right.

Now return to step one, the horizontal long swing. You may find it easier to see things moving in the opposite direction to your own motion. End by palming for a moment.

SHIFTING

The normal eye makes many tiny movements per second. These are known as saccadic movements, from *saccade*, the French for “jerk.” You may have noticed that the eyes of people with exceptionally good vision often have a sparkling or piercing quality. This appearance is caused by these constant small movements of the eyes, which produce not only a



special brightness but also clarity and sharpness of vision. Whether the shifting is automatic or deliberate, the movement is invisible to the observer. Your eyes will simply look alert and lively.

The purpose of saccadic movements is to engage the macula - the part of the eye solely responsible for sharp, detailed vision. (The spot that sees with greatest clarity, the fovea, is in the center of the macula.) When we see with any part of the eye other than the macula, we lose most of our capacity for detailed vision. Because it is so small, the macula can see only small portions of the visual field at any one moment, though it sees them in very fine detail. For this reason, the normal eye makes constant, small, rapid movements as the macula moves from point to point, receiving a constant stream of visual information.

When vision begins to deteriorate, the saccadic movements become slower, larger, and less frequent. Vision blurs as details lose their definition or are lost

altogether. This freezing of vision can arise from physical and/or emotional causes.

Shifting exercises are designed to restore the natural free movement of the macula. As the name implies, these exercises all involve shifting your point of focus from place to place, in imitation of normal saccadic movement. Though this movement must be consciously practiced at first, with time it becomes an automatic and effortless process, as it is for the healthy eye.

When you practice shifting, the key to success is to look with a soft eye, by which I mean that you allow yourself to see whatever you can see, without straining or forcing yourself to see anything in particular. Do not demand from yourself that you see any specific detail with clarity. Instead, allow your eyes and your mind to take in every detail available, without straining after those that are not yet available. If you do fixate on the point you are trying to see, your vision will freeze and shifting will stop.

For anyone who wears glasses, no matter how strong or weak the prescription, a soft gaze is especially important. You have been accustomed to using your glasses to bring you whatever detail you want to see. Now you must be willing to give this up — at least temporarily. You must give up the need to see before you can improve your vision.

Your eyes may grow tired during shifting — not because the shifting itself is strenuous, but because you bring into it your old habits of straining to see. When this happens, take a break from shifting for a moment or two. Palm, sun, or close your eyes and visualize random and beautiful patterns of movement, such as waves rolling in, seagulls wheeling, or clouds blowing across the sky. Let your mind's eye move with these images for a minute or two, and then try

to continue a graceful, easy flow of movement when you open your eyes and look again.

How Often Should I Shift?

When you begin to work on your eyes, you should set aside at least twenty minutes a day specifically for shifting exercises. Your aim is ultimately to make shifting an automatic function.

Shifting Exercises

Whenever you remember to, move your eyes from point to point on whatever it is you are looking at. Instead of looking at a tree, look at the individual parts that make up the tree visually, and then move from larger to smaller details of those parts. Remember to blink and breathe as often as possible; both of these actions will help your eyes to move more freely and easily. You may be surprised at the amount of detail you can see. Without necessarily gaining any measurable change in your vision, you will see better simply because you are seeing consciously.

Refine this process by taking note of those details you cannot see clearly. For example, you may be able to clearly distinguish a tree, a branch on the tree, and an individual leaf on the branch; but you may not be able to see the veins and markings on the leaf. Let your eyes roam freely over the leaf, noting whatever you can of its shape, color, and so on — anything that is available to your vision. Do not worry about forming an exact picture of the leaf. Just look and look, like a visitor from outer space who is seeing the things of Earth for the first time. Do not force yourself to see; just allow yourself to look. Then close your eyes, recall whatever details you can, and picture them as being in sharp contrast to their background. See the leaf as bright where the background is dark; in color where the background is white; coming toward you as

the background recedes; or whatever will most sharply distinguish the object from its surroundings.

Bring fine details closer to you, making them more accessible. Take a picture that you like and hold it close enough to see every detail clearly without straining; then shift from point to point. If you are looking at a face, hone in on one eye and look at every separate eyelash, every separate spot of color in the iris. Divide the forehead into quarters, then into eighths, and so on, until you are looking at the smallest possible unit of detail. Close your eyes and recall those details you have seen, then open them again and look for new details.

After a while, you may notice the distinctions between separate details growing sharper. For some people, this change can happen almost instantaneously, while for others it takes months. The time factor is not important. Learning to see details is.

Shifting with an Eye Chart

To use the eye chart enclosed with this study guide in your shifting exercises, attach it to a tree, fence, or post. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, remove them. Move away from the chart until you can easily read the top three or four large-print lines, but stand far enough away that the bottom lines are still blurry. Read the smallest line of type you can see clearly. Relax, breathe deeply, and blink.

“Draw” with your eyes: that is, follow the outlines of each letter. At the same time, occasionally raise both hands to your ears and wiggle your fingers to stimulate your peripheral vision and take some strain off your central vision. After reading each letter, close your eyes and visualize it: the letter is very black and easy to see, the edges are crisp and clean, and the background is very white. Trace the letter’s contours in your mind’s eye. The same brain cells work for

visualizing as for seeing, and you are retraining your brain to command better vision.

Reduce your eyestrain during this exercise with a little sunning (see page 52 for complete sunning directions). With eyes closed, face the sun and move your head from side to side a hundred times, stopping to palm briefly after every thirty head turns. Open your eyes and see if the letters are clearer.

Now look three lines below the line you have been using. *Do not* try to read the letters. Let your eyes get curious and explore them - the blackness of the letters, the spaces between them. Again, reduce eyestrain with breathing, blinking, and finger-wiggling beside your ears. Count off the letters on that line out loud: letter, space, letter, space, etc. Close your eyes and briefly visualize what you just saw, but clearer. Look at the line again, and then at the first line you read. Are they any clearer? If so, look at the next line down. Can you see it better now?

Work your way down the chart, line by line. When you finish a line, rest your eyes by going back to the original line and noticing how easy it is to see. Accept the blurs and enjoy the details - you will find you can divide and conquer, as I did. Continue to treat the letters like strange objects from outer space, investigating blackness, shapes, and the spaces between. Breathe, blink, and wiggle your fingers from time to time. Your eyes will feel more relaxed and alive.

In bad weather, do this exercise indoors. You can substitute palming for sunning to reduce your eyestrain.

READING

The first indication of some eye problems will typically come through noticing the distance at which

you need to hold a book in order to read comfortably. To determine your visual acuity, the eye doctor will ask you to read rows of printed letters on eye charts.

Reading is one of the most sensitive issues for a nearsighted person. The typical nearsighted person (and there is such a thing) loves to read and would do it until the eyes gave out completely if time and life allowed. What few of us book-lovers remember is that reading is a strenuous physical activity involving a delicately balanced pair of organs. We become absorbed by the flow of information from the page to our minds, and forget how hard our eyes are working to create that flow.

Reading can potentially be very harmful for the eyes, which are biologically designed to adjust from close to distant focus continually. Reading does not have to be damaging, however; in fact, you can actually use reading to improve your overall vision. Reading exercises stimulate the habit of shifting, making them especially helpful for myopia, astigmatism, and hyperopia.

Protecting Your Eyes when You Read

Most often, it's not the act of reading itself but our poor reading habits that are responsible for the damage reading can do. Here are some general rules that will help make even prolonged reading easier for your eyes:

- Never read in uncomfortable light, whether too bright or too dim. The wrong light will tire your eyes faster than anything else. Your eyes will tell you if the light is wrong; all you need to do is pay attention to them. If reading feels difficult, the light is the first thing to check.
- Just as you would naturally take breaks from hard physical labor, you need to give your eyes breaks

from the hard labor of reading. At least every twenty minutes or so, stop and palm for about five minutes.

- Blink constantly to keep your eyes from staring or drying out. If your eyes burn during or after reading, it may be because you become so involved with what you are reading that you forget to blink. Remind yourself to blink as often as you can.
- As much as possible, try to avoid anything that is printed in a hard-to-read typeface. Many publications are printed in type so faint, so small, so unclear, so dense, or so elaborate that it would give anyone eyestrain. Stay away from such print. If you have difficulty with necessary reading tasks such as legal documents or phone books, do not strain your eyes; read them when your eyes are rested, and in a comfortable light.
- Breathe. Even though your mind may be in another world, your body is still in this one, and your eyes need oxygen more than ever. There is a tendency to hold one's breath while reading, as in many concentrated activities; so remind yourself to breathe as often as you remind yourself to blink.

Reading and Shifting

Speed reading, if you do it frequently, may eventually cause vision losses. In speed reading, you try to take in whole sentences - or even whole paragraphs - simultaneously. This behavior unconsciously imitates the pattern of myopic sight: making large, infrequent jumps and trying to take in a large visual field. Remember that the macula can see only small areas at a time, and that it sees by moving from point to point. Forcing your eyes to swallow an entire sentence at one gulp makes it impossible for the macula to participate fully — and of course, the less

your macula works, the more blurred your sight will be. (Shifting between various print sizes, as in Appendix B, may help you see details better and sharpen your eyesight. See below for complete instructions.)

Reading Upside Down

Take this page, turn it upside down, and read one letter at a time, letting your eyes move from point to point as they slowly and carefully trace the shape of each letter. Blink constantly as you do so. This practice will train you to be more aware of the letters, focusing you on the physical act of seeing rather than on the meaning of the words. It will also make you more aware of what your eyes are doing when you read — an awareness we usually lose in our absorption with the contents of a book. If you find this difficult, it is a clue that this is an especially effective exercise for you.

Shifting with Varying Print Sizes

Shifting with various size print teaches relaxed, strong focusing skills. Use the paragraphs of varying print sizes in Appendix B (page 61). Make sure you have removed your contact lenses or glasses. The key is to stay relaxed — your eyes work a lot better when you cut down on needless effort. Instead of straining to see, maintain a neutral state of mind, and allow what you are looking at to appear to you.

Find a quiet spot, preferably a place where sunlight can fall on the page. If you are nearsighted, hold the page far enough away that you can read the largest block of print almost clearly. If this is farther away than arm's length, tape the page to the wall, or to a sunny fence if you are outdoors. If you are farsighted, hold the page a bit too close to be entirely comfortable.

Start to look at the block of large print, one letter at a time. Let your eyes take a walk over each letter, feeling out its shape and the spaces around it. Your brain gets its focusing cues from edges, borders, and in-between spaces - you are giving it an extra nudge.

Briefly close your eyes and picture the letter - but with crisper outlines, blacker ink, and a cleaner background. Open your eyes and see if the image is sharper. It probably will be. After you have read a few lines, move on to a paragraph that is a size or two smaller, where you cannot quite make out the letters. Keep the page where it is. Do not worry about whether you can read it. Examine each strange, blurry object, one at a time. Look at contours, edges, and spaces. Enjoy their strangeness.

Try turning the page upside down, and looking at the same line. This makes it easier to use the letters to reprogram your visual habits rather than looking at them in your usual way. Again, close your eyes and picture that the page is very white and the letters very black. Say out loud, "The page is white and the letters are black." Now open your eyes and see whether the letters are less fuzzy. Go back to the larger text and see whether the letters look bigger and clearer. They probably will.

Stop the exercise and check whether your eyes feel tired. They need a lot of relaxation when you are reprogramming visual habits. Take a few slow, deep breaths, relaxing into the out-breath. Now blink for one or two minutes, lightly massaging your temples. If your eyes still feel tired, do the palming exercise briefly and then look off into the distance, scanning the smallest details you can see - distance vision rests your eyes.

Go on to the next smaller size of text; run your eyes again over each blurry letter for shapes, edges,

and spaces, picture it clearer, and then check whether it is easier to read. Now return to the largest print. You will probably find it much clearer, and seemingly larger, than when you started the exercise. Look at the smallest print again before returning to your reading or computer screen. As you look at the page or screen, pay attention to smaller areas than the ones your eyes tend to focus on. In a soft way, without straining to see, look from point to point.

Shifting and Waving with an Eye Chart

This exercise and the one that follows help integrate the weaker eye into the process of seeing, thereby balancing the use of both eyes. These exercises also balance central and peripheral vision.

Get out the smallest rectangle you used in the peripheral vision exercise and attach it between your eyes. Put the eye chart on the wall. Turn your head slightly to one side, so that you are looking at the eye chart with your weaker eye. (To check whether you are positioned correctly, close your weaker eye for a moment. Your stronger eye should see the small paper, but should not be able to see the eye chart.)

Wave your hand or a piece of paper rapidly in front of the stronger eye. With the weaker eye, repeat the eye chart shifting exercise you did earlier: looking at letters a few lines below the line you can easily see, appreciating the blackness and contours of the letters and the whiteness of the background, closing your eyes and visualizing that the letters are more distinct; then opening them and checking whether the image is a little sharper.

Shifting and Waving with Varying Print Sizes

Do the same exercise as the preceding one except that with the weaker eye, look at Appendix B rather than the eye chart. If you are unable to read normal-size print, use a page or book of large print. Read for

about five minutes. Begin and end the exercise with palming or looking out of a window and scanning small details in the distance.

Reading and Peripheral Vision

When you read, write, or do any kind of work that could tax your central vision, it is very helpful to stimulate the periphery by waving or wiggling your hands to the sides of your eyes. This motion genuinely takes the strain out of reading.

We have many opportunities to overwork the central vision and neglect the periphery: crowded city streets, narrow freeway lanes, computers, documents covered with tiny print and incomprehensible data — all these seem designed to promote tunnel vision and narrow our horizons. Peripheral exercises are one way to counteract this problem.

Creating Flexibility between Near and Distant Vision

Find yourself a pleasant place from which you can see well into the distance. The top of a hill or any other high place is especially good. Look all the way to the farthest horizon, and let your eyes move from point to point, as though you are sketching the outlines of what you see. You may be able to distinguish only general shapes, colors, and degrees of brightness at this distance. Let your eyes enjoy playing with these, as they might enjoy looking at an abstract painting.

Then focus your attention slightly closer, and keep your eyes shifting from point to point. Perhaps the details you see may be a bit more distinct, but remember not to become fixed on them or try too hard to see them. Just enjoy them, keeping your eyes soft and receptive. Repeat this process, bringing your plane of focus a little closer to you each time, until your eyes are shifting on the area immediately in

front of you: on the windowsill, a heap of leaves on the ground, or your feet. At this point, look for the tiniest details you can possibly distinguish. Always remember to blink, breathe, and keep your eyes soft as you do this and all eye exercises.

Now repeat the exercise in reverse, choosing gradually more distant visual targets. Repeat the entire exercise several times.

SUNNING

Sunning is a primary exercise for training your eyes to accept the light of day - a capacity many of us have lost after spending most of our lives indoors. Do this exercise at a time of day when the sunlight is coming into your eyes at a diagonal angle and is not too strong. Generally speaking, before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m. are the ideal times to sun; but this guideline can change in different regions and seasons. Use sunblock to protect your skin during the warmer seasons.

Sit or stand outside or at an open window (remember: never sun through glass). **CLOSE YOUR EYES.** Facing the sun, move your head from side to side, bringing your chin all the way to your shoulder before turning to the other shoulder. Imagine that someone is holding your head between their hands and very gently turning it for you. Breathe deeply and slowly. Your head should move

- constantly, without stopping
- as slowly as possible, as though it were rolling lazily from one shoulder to the other (chin to shoulder, not ear to shoulder)
- effortlessly, a full 180 degrees (most people will need to move the whole upper body to complete the movement)



Turn from side to side in this way at least thirty times, relaxing your eyes as you do so. Imagine that the sun is bathing your eyes and head. Feel it penetrating all the way through your body. Sense the sun enveloping your head and brain; feel it penetrating to the back of your head, the back of your torso, the back of your legs.

While still turning your head smoothly from side to side, rub your hands together and, still rubbing, turn your back to the sun. Palm for at least the duration of ten slow, deep breaths. Now turn back and sun again. Remember to keep breathing deeply and slowly. If you are comfortable with it, continue this alternation of approximately two minutes of sunning with one or two minutes of palming for up to twenty-five minutes.

You will probably notice a sense of relaxation in your eyes as they become accustomed to the bright light. You may also notice that the color you see while sunning becomes brighter, while the color you see while palming becomes progressively darker until you are truly seeing perfect blackness. When this happens, you will know that the irises of your eyes have become more flexible, making the change from

darkness to light with greater ease. Your optic nerve will be more relaxed, able to receive stimuli more comfortably and to rest after receiving them.

When you have practiced sunning for several weeks, you may gradually begin to sun for longer periods — perhaps five or six minutes — between palming interludes; but it is always a good idea to break up the sunning with palming. Not only does this give your eyes a rest, it also encourages flexibility in the irises.

Your eye muscles may resist the light at first, even with your eyes closed. Try to notice whether you sense tension in your eyes or around them, and allow the muscles to relax. Also notice the strength of the light coming though your closed lids, and the color of the light that penetrates your eyelids — this can range from dark red through orange and yellow to a brilliant white. If you see green, it means your eyes are straining. You should discontinue sunning for a while and try some palming before returning to it.

How Long Should I Sun?

Twenty minutes of sunning per day is my average recommendation. You can break this down into sessions of five to fifteen minutes, depending on how much your eyes have adapted to accept more light. Do not let your eyes become tired or strained; if they do, be sure to palm until they feel good again. A cool cloth compress on your closed eyes is also very soothing and refreshing.

NOTE: After teaching and practicing sunning with literally thousands of students, I have never known sunning to damage anyone's eyes. Some doctors, however, believe that exposure to the sun can encourage the formation of cataracts. If this is of concern to you, please talk with your ophthalmologist about sunning. If your doctor objects to the practice,

inquire about studies proving the connection between eye damage and the sun. Take the time to read them yourself, and if you still feel uncomfortable about sunning, please do not do it.

Sunning Variation

After sunning for about ten minutes, try the following variation. Here, you will massage your eyebrows to increase the amount of light entering your eyes. Close your eyes and place your right index and middle fingers on your right eyebrow, with your hand held high enough so that it does not block light from entering your right eye. Now turn your head slowly to the left, pressing gently but firmly upward with your fingertips as you do so. The motion of your head causes your fingers, which are stationary, to stroke your eyebrow. Your fingertips should exert a gentle pull on the eyebrow, stretching it. Your eye should remain closed.

Move your head all the way to the left, then to the right, and alternate several times. Then switch hands, placing the left index and middle fingers on the left eyebrow as your head turns to the right. This may take some practice to do smoothly. Remember to breathe deeply, move slowly, and relax. Repeat this motion several times, palm, and return to the original sunning.

SKYING

The purpose of skying is similar to that of sunning: to teach the eyes and brain to accept light comfortably, without a sense of strain. It is a good alternative to sunning on cloudy days.

Turn away from where the sun should be, in case it comes out again, and face the sky with eyes open. Blink continuously. Place one hand on the back of your neck and the other on your forehead, making

sure that the hand on your forehead does not block the light coming into your eyes. The hand on your neck should be clawed and the other stretched, with the bony prominences at the base of your fingers pressing hard on your forehead.

Now move your head from side to side, while keeping your hands in their original position. Only your head is moving; not your hands. As you turn your head, it should move against your hands, creating the effect of a firm massage to your neck and forehead. Doing this for several minutes will increase circulation and relaxation in your face, neck, and eyes.

Palm for a minute and return to the basic sunning exercise.

MAKING TIME FOR YOUR EYES

Dr. Bates was often asked, "Why do eye exercises take so long to do?" His answer was that we work on our eyes, one way or another, all the time. We either work on them in a way that freezes them, or we work on them in a way that makes them more alive. His suggestion was to take the opportunity to make our eyes more alive.

In every situation, there is a better way to use your eyes. There are many opportunities each day to practice new visual habits. Waiting for a bus; standing in line at the bank; stalled in traffic - you can take advantage of all these situations to work on your eyes.

Ideally, you should devote at least an hour each day to the structured exercise program on *Yoga for Your Eyes*. However, I believe you will find that even spending a few minutes daily with some of these exercises will yield measurable results, in the form of diminished eye strain, clearer vision, and a greater ability to shift your focus without loss of clarity.

It has been my experience that, when people do these vision improvement exercises correctly — and devote to them the time they deserve - mild vision problems improve rapidly and poor vision improves noticeably over a longer period. It is common to see improvements in even the first session, but it takes longer to stabilize these gains. The brief flashes of better vision are a hallmark of impending change.

CONCLUSION

The most important step you can take, psychologically, is to decide that working on yourself is important. Our modern life continuously assaults our eyes; thus the sign of a healthy psyche is that you are naturally moved to take care of them. The more common approach of simply doing whatever it takes to make your eyes function points to a deeper problem: a commitment to achievement at all costs.

Yet the happiness you seek through accomplishments is more readily available to you when you let go of meeting outside expectations and begin to pay attention to what your mind, body, and spirit actually need. Paradoxically, you are likely to discover that the most important achievements of your life come relatively easily when you are truly taking care of yourself.

Because they are among the hardest-worked and least-nurtured organs in your body, your eyes are an excellent place to begin your program of self-care. Declare your intention to take care of your eyes all day long, and learn how much better you can feel — not only physically, but in every way. Let your eyes teach you how to gradually change the way you look at the world — literally — so that your well-being becomes more important to you than all the trophies this world can give you.

By all means, sit in front of the computer, perform your job; but also take breaks to look out of the window. Read, but also palm. You do not have to revise your lifestyle, only add to it. Probably nothing needs to change in your exterior world; all that needs to change is the relationship that you have with your eyes and your brain. If you take this route, I guarantee that your life is going to be very different.

APPENDIX A

A Three-Day Guided Palming Meditation

This progressive, three-part meditation can help support and provide a focal point for your daily eye yoga. Read the following meditations very slowly onto a tape, or have a friend with a deep, soothing voice read them onto a tape that you can listen to as you palm. Recording soothing music in the background can enhance your experience still more. The reading should be very slow. Keep the music going during pauses in the text. Instructions to the reader appear in brackets — [] — and are not to be recorded.

First day

Relax your lower back and imagine that it is light. Relax your chest and imagine that it is light. Visualize that your hands are warming your eyes. Now breathe deeply, counting to six as you inhale and to nine as you exhale. Inhale ... one, two, three, four, five, six. Exhale ... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Inhale again and feel how your abdomen is expanding, and exhale feeling how your abdomen is shrinking ... six, seven, eight, nine. [Pause 30 seconds]

Inhale and imagine your lower back expanding with your breath. Exhale and feel it shrinking gradually ... six, seven, eight, nine. Inhale and imagine your

chest, ribs, and upper back expanding, and exhale letting them shrink ... four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Inhale again and imagine your whole body expanding as you inhale, shrinking as you exhale. Count ten breaths as you visualize this expansion and contraction. [Pause 60 seconds]

Second day

[Repeat the meditation for the first day and continue with this:]

As you continue to breathe slowly, imagine that your head is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your neck is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your shoulders are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your upper arms are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your elbows are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your forearms are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale ___ Imagine that your hands and fingers are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale—

Think of your eyes as soft, big, and watery _____ Imagine that your eyes are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your back is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale __ Imagine that your chest is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale ___ Imagine that your abdomen is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your pelvis is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your buttocks are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your thighs are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Imagine that your calves are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you

exhale.... Imagine that your feet are expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale.... Now imagine that your whole body is expanding as you inhale ... and shrinking as you exhale....

[Repeat this meditation three times on the second day.]

Third day

[On the third day, repeat the first two segments and continue with the following:]

Visualize that you are seeing black, but do not try to force it. Imagine a starless night.... Imagine movement in that blackness ... a train running on a mountain ... a white sailboat on a black sea ... a black river flowing.... If the image disappears, it is all right ... do not try to force it back.... Imagine that your whole room is black. Think of every object in your room and paint it black.... [Pause for 30 seconds]

Relax your jaw, inhale through your nose, exhale through your nose, and exhale further through your mouth with a sigh. Feel completely relaxed. [Pause for 60 seconds]

When you are ready, slowly let the blackness of your room dissolve ... gradually remove your palms from your eye orbits ... and gently open your eyes.

APPENDIX B

Print of Varying Sizes

A retinoscope measures visual acuity. Dr. Bates, the founding father of vision improvement, used a retinoscope to check hundreds of thousands of eyes - human and animal, young and old.

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GLOSSARY

- accommodation:** unconscious process by which the eye adjusts itself to focus on near objects. Accommodation is the work of autonomic muscles within the eye called the *ciliary muscles*, which contract, allowing the lens to become rounder. At rest, the eye is focused for distant vision, and the lens is relatively flat.
- astigmatism:** irregular curvature of the cornea or lens of the eye, resulting in blurring of vision at some angles.
- blinking:** an unconscious behavior that massages and bathes the eye, relieves tension around it, and breaks up the habit of staring. Most people with poor eyesight have lost the ability to blink effortlessly and frequently; thus, it is an important vision improvement exercise.
- ciliary muscles:** muscles within the eye, governed by the autonomic nervous system, that release the lens from the tendinous sling that holds it in an oblong shape. This allows the lens to assume a rounder shape, which focuses the eye for near vision.
- fovea centralis:** the area of greatest visual acuity within the eye. The fovea is a tiny, pit-shaped area of the retina, at the center of the macula, which contains only cone cells. The nerve cells that overlie the rods and cones in every other part of the retina are pulled aside in this area.
- glaucoma:** a condition of excessive fluid pressure within the eye that causes damage (such as nerve fiber destruction and compression of blood vessels), leading to deteriorating vision or blindness.

hyperopia: a refractive error, often called farsightedness, in which the focal length of the eye is too short. Images are focused behind the retina rather than on it, rendering near vision inadequate.

hypermetropia: hyperopia

macula: full name *macula lutea*; the area at the center of the retina where detailed vision is possible. Vision is sharpest at the center of the macula, called the *fovea*.

myopia: a refractive error, also called nearsightedness, in which the focal length of the eye is too long. Images are focused in front of the retina rather than on it, rendering distant vision inadequate.

palming: a vision improvement exercise believed by vision improvement teachers to rest the optic nerve and muscles within and around the eye, relax the nervous system, and amplify the effect of other eye exercises. Palming is usually done in a darkened room with the hands lightly covering the eyes while blackness or darkness is envisioned.

retinoscope: an instrument for measuring the direction and extent of refractive errors.

saccadic movements: the eye's normal small, jerky movements as it moves fixation from one small point to another. Saccadic movements are too rapid to be visible.

shifting: an exercise used by vision improvement teachers to create fluidity and flexibility in the gaze by imitating the anatomically appropriate use of the eyes, in which they move effortlessly from one small detail to another.

skying: a variant of the *sunning* vision improvement exercise for cloudy, overcast days. Skying is done with open eyes, looking away from the sun, with a smaller rotation of the head than in sunning.

soft eyes: the opposite of the “frozen stare” that is the hallmark of bad eyesight, and characteristic of good eyesight and healthy eyes. A soft gaze moves easily from one small detail to another, accepting what it sees.

sternocleidomastoids: a pair of neck muscles, originating from the breastbone and clavicle and inserting into the mastoid (a small, bony projection below the ear). These muscles work together to bend the head forward. Either of them, working alone, rotates the head to the opposite side or bends it toward the shoulder of the same side.

sunning: a vision improvement exercise designed to teach the eyes to adjust to a wide range of intensities of light. Sunning is done in mild sunshine, facing the sun, with the eyes lightly closed, often with self-massage around the eyes, and with the head or upper body continually rotating through 180 degrees.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- . and Maureen Larkin, with Dror Schneider. *The Handbook of Self Healing*. London: Penguin Arkana, 1994.

“Schneider’s techniques are remarkably simple.... You can improve your eyesight by regularly performing this series of simple exercises.”

-YOGA JOURNAL

“The founder of the School for Self-Healing in San Francisco has designed a program that should alleviate eye strain and enhance the vision of those who faithfully follow it. ”

- LOS ANGELES TIMES



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is the founder and director of the School for Self-Healing in San Francisco. He is the author of *Self-Healing: My Life and Vision* (Penguin, 1987), *Handbook of Self-Healing: Your Personal Program for Better Health and Increased Vitality* (Penguin, 1994), and (on audio) *Miracle Eyesight Method* (Sounds True, 1996).

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