

# Can Eyesight Improve Naturally?

*by Esther Joy van der Werf*

- A report issued on April 18 2007 by Prevent Blindness America estimates the costs associated with adult vision problems in the United States at a staggering \$51.4 billion.
- According to Richard Wallingford, OD, president of the American Optometric Association (AOA), approximately 25 percent of all school aged children have vision problems.
- "Sixty percent of people aged 65 and over have cataracts nationwide, and that (percentage) increases with age" says John Ciccone, director of communications for the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery in Fairfax, VA.

These numbers are an indication of the enormity of the problem of vision deterioration. I've heard estimates that more than 80% of the population in the USA has vision problems. Our eyesight challenges seem to be getting worse, not better, despite well over 32,000 optometrists currently in practice in the United States alone (as per information on the AOA website). What is wrong with this picture!?

Optometrists advise us to have regular, preferably annual, eye exams, so they can prescribe compensating lenses at the earliest sign of vision deterioration. However, the obvious tendency is for vision to get worse, not better, when glasses or contacts are worn. Glasses are a nuisance, contacts are not much better, and in general most users of compensating lenses are not satisfied with having to use these crutches for the rest of their lives. Out of despair people turn to laser operations in large numbers, while cataract sufferers wait for the 'ripening' of their cataracts so they can have lens replacement surgery.

Is there another option? Is there a natural approach to solving these many vision challenges? Is there a solution without associated risks or nasty side-effects?

Happily, the answer is a resounding YES. Dr William H Bates, MD, an ophthalmologist from New York (1860-1931), discovered that eye-strain is the major cause of vision deterioration and he set out to find the solution. He concluded that the tension on the muscles around the eyes could be released by simple relaxation techniques, and that applying these techniques resulted in a speedy return to clear vision for most people. His techniques are still taught today and are known as 'The Bates Method'. The key to reducing the cost and number of vision problems IS available, and the side effects are pleasant: clearer vision, better color perception, increased depth perception, reduction or elimination of headaches, improved memory, and more.

Over the years, the Bates Method has been misunderstood and it is sometimes interpreted as a series of eye exercises. This is unfortunate, as the essence of the method has nothing to do with exercises; it is all about relaxation.

Attempting to cure eye strain with eye exercises is like trying to run a mile with strained calf muscles; it is likely to be counter-productive. The smarter idea is to release the strain on the muscles first, and if you then want to do exercises... well, go ahead, enjoy. You will notice however, that people with clear vision do not do eye exercises. They have no reason to. After releasing the eye strain, the vision clears up naturally, and there will be no need for eye exercises. In order to be healthy the eyes simply need to be used in a relaxed, effortless way, all day long.

Anyone who is dissatisfied with their current level of visual blur or who is frustrated with the need for compensating lenses will be happy to know that it is possible to return to clear vision naturally. The first step to reaching that goal is to become aware of how you currently use your eyes. Do you tend to squint or stare? Or do you effortlessly blink and let your eyes move freely? Do you tend to reach for sunglasses the moment you step outside or are your eyes comfortable with bright light? Squinting, staring and light sensitivity are indications of eye strain.

Regular, easy blinking; eyes that happily move rapidly and freely; and the ability of the eyes to be comfortable in bright sunlight are signs of relaxed healthy vision. To go from strained vision habits to relaxed vision habits requires an awareness of how the eyes are used, and continually applying relaxed vision habits in place of the old strained habits. It is not possible to predict how long it will take to return to 20/20 or better vision, but the good news is that it usually takes much less time to return to clarity than it took to reach your current level of blurry vision!

For guidance on how to return to a relaxed way of seeing, and to free yourself from the burden of glasses, contact lenses, or the risks of surgery, contact an experienced Bates Method teacher. You too can begin and enjoy your path to clarity.