

TREAT YOUR EYES RIGHT

A Holistic Guide to Better Vision

**BY JOANNA ROTTÉ, PH.D.,
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THE WORST TREATMENT THE eyes can receive is consistent one-point focusing, a use of the eyes completely averse to their naturally mobile state. You might think that in order to concentrate on something, it must be stared at. This is not so. Real mental concentration, like meditation, embodies an unstrained, effortless looking, opposite to staring. In real concentration, the muscles of the upper body are relaxed, the intake of oxygen is deep, and the exhalation of carbon dioxide is long, as when laughing.

When you need to concentrate, first relax the muscle system and put your mind at ease, detached from the subject or object of concentration. Then consciously relax your eyes and keep them moving.

Viewing Television and Films: As is widely recognized, many children in modernized countries are nearsighted. One obvious contributing factor is their habitual television viewing. Though it might seem so, the problem does not arise from the constant flickering light emanating from the television screen. Rather, incessant staring without moving the eyes is the major cause of nearsightedness in children addicted to television. In addition, the radiation emitted by a television is detrimental to the

nervous system, which of course includes the eyes.

If you are prone to television and movie viewing, you ought to know that it is less harmful to the vision to watch a comic show than a seriously dramatic one. That is because laughter, or at least a mind disposed to the kind of acceptance that levity invokes, releases bodily tension through a deepening of the breath. Deep breathing and laughter allow the viewer and his or her eyes to relax.

Reading: Nearsighted people sometimes come to the conclusion that their poor vision is the result of excessive reading. In actuality, the cause is not the volume of material read but the manner of reading. Myopia can result from a combination of incorrect posture and mental tension, especially in the presence of poor light while reading, but it does not result from the action of reading itself.

Regarding the posture while reading, if the chin is tilted upward or pushed forward, then the back of the neck will be compressed and not allowed to stretch. Given this position, the blood cannot circulate freely up through the neck but stagnates around the shoulders and in the neck. If this neck posture becomes habitual, then the shoulder blades and spine will become misaligned, causing certain internal organs (connected to the spine by the nervous system) to malfunction. And since the power to see is related to the nervous system, to the circulatory system, and to certain internal organs, particularly the liver and kidneys, the vision can be adversely affected by poor posture.

Regarding the mind while reading, if it is unpeaceful or anxious, for example if you are in a hurry to read, the eyesight can be harmed. It can also be hurt by reading simply because you cannot sleep, since insomnia is a disease involving mental tension.

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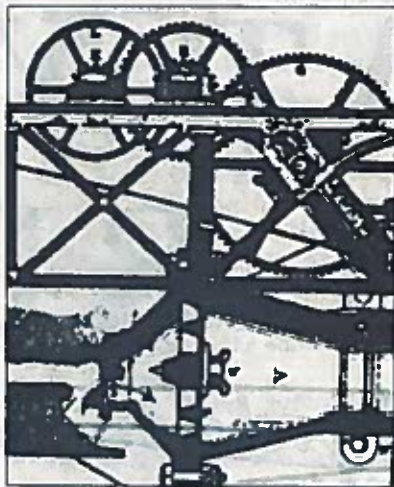
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Regarding the light while reading, excess intensity such as bright sunlight is even more difficult for the eyes to bear than little light. Whatever the source of illumination, and regular light bulbs are preferable to fluorescent ones, the light should not reflect directly into the eyes.

The following considerations contain guidelines to assist you in developing reading habits salutary and not injurious to your vision:

When reading a book new to you, especially one concerned with your education or profession, you might try to concentrate too hard. Such effort oftentimes results in holding the breath or breathing in spurts. A more relaxed and effective way of studying is to *read each section of new material three times over*. The first reading is a



detached scanning to collect the general idea. With the second reading, your understanding will increase, allowing you to relax. During the third reading, you may partake the import of the text, now without strain.

As a study aid and also because using your hands energizes blood circulation and the functioning of the brain, *take notes while reading*. Especially take time to write down complicated or elusive words and passages.

If you are to understand deeply the content of the subject matter, it is necessary to read not with the eyes and mind alone, but with all the five senses; actually, *read with the whole body*. To do anything with the whole body is the natural way of doing. One way to insure the use of the whole body while reading is to move or sway slowly from

side to side and forward and backward. This can be effected by reading aloud periodically. For example, whenever you encounter a difficult passage or complex phrasing, *read aloud* so that the breathing will deepen and the body will sway, as happens when chanting.

Keep your eyes in motion and not glued to the text. Try looking at individual letters comprising a word and then at the full word, at big letters and then at small ones. Follow sentences individually. And to avoid blood stagnation, *periodically blink your eyes*. Also, move the book itself, taking it to distances nearer to and farther from your eyes and holding it at various heights. If you consistently keep the book at the same eye-level and distance, focusing only in one direction, you weaken the eye muscles and their power to adjust.

In general, *keep your entire situation fluent when studying*. Alternate subjects as from history to mathematics to literature, or change books dealing with the same subject.

Whatever precautions you take and whatever good study habits you develop, it is exhausting to subject yourself continuously to any one stimulation. When reading, *divert your attention* out the window or to paintings on the walls. Looking at a far point—and it is good to study in a place where you can see far into the distance—compels the eye muscles to adjust themselves. You might also have at hand a pleasing object to observe, thus refreshing your senses and nervous system. If the object is bright and shiny, it will activate the lachrymal glands, moistening your eyes. (If everything around you seems too bright, the eyes are dry and possibly inflamed. To prevent dryness of the eyes, eat foods rich in minerals, sea vegetables for example, and rich in vitamins, whole grains and vegetables varying in color for example. It is recommended to obtain minerals and vitamins directly through the diet rather than to depend upon tablet supplements.) *Interrupt your study* by listening to music or taking a walk out-of-doors. Both these activities invigorate the whole body. And at times, just close your eyes and stop thinking to give your brain a rest.

Studying can easily become a tension-producing pursuit. If it is to be a relaxing pursuit, you must aim to *keep your breath flow regular*. Try to adjust your rate of reading—speeding up

and slowing down—so that your rate of breathing may find its natural, best level. The reason it is less tiring to read a popular novel than to study is that light reading automatically regulates the breathing.

Also find the posture which allows for regular breathing and good blood circulation, so as to put the least strain possible on your eyes. *Avoid stooping or hunching postures*, since these create tension in the neck and shoulders, thereby checking blood circulation to the eyes. Keep your chin pulled back and spine upright, and concentrate on putting power into the lower abdomen and lumbar region, so as to *keep the upper body free*. At frequent intervals, rotate your head and neck both clockwise and counterclockwise while exhaling; and from time to time shake your whole body suddenly all at once.

Since the neck and shoulders become particularly tight at times of over-excitement, self-consciousness, and mental attachment, try to *keep your mind calm* when studying. An attitude of acceptance, better yet of enjoyment, causes the power to be centered in the lower body, freeing the upper. Also, *keep your facial expression relaxed* by letting your head nod and move, and foremost, whenever your face feels strained, just smile.

Do not worry if it takes time for your eyes to adjust to any of the various stimulations you have been advised to offer yourself when reading. Any change that causes the eyes to move is an improvement over eye fixation.

Eye Strengthening

YOGA TRADITION MAINTAINS at least three methods of visual concentration, which though they may be likened to staring are not harmful but strengthening to the eye muscles. Since in these kinds of "staring" the mind is to comport itself as if in meditation, there should not be eyestrain.

Visual Concentration: For the following methods, sit in a meditation posture, keeping the spine and back of the neck stretched. In the beginning, do each exercise once or twice for a short time only. Then gradually increase your ability to focus.

1. Without blinking, focus on the tip of your nose, concentrating until tears

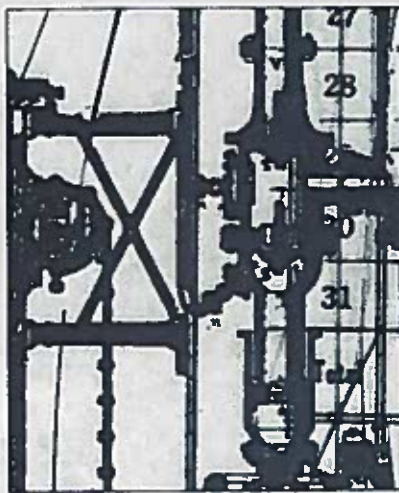
come. Close your eyes and relax.

2. Without blinking, focus on the third eye—that point between the eyebrows—until tears come. Close your eyes and relax.

3. Pull your chin straight back to stretch the back of the neck. Without turning your head, focus both eyes on the right shoulder until tears come. Repeat with your focus on the left shoulder. Close your eyes and relax.

After practicing these exercises, cover your eyes with a cold cloth and do palm healing on them. Then perform the following eye-strengthening exercises as a balance to visual concentration.

Imagination Seeing: As a preparation, lie face up in the corpse or relaxation pose with the palms up and feet open to pelvis-width. Consciously



relax your whole body, breathing deeply. Then sit up and look briefly at some object. Close your eyes and continue "seeing" the object. This exercise relaxes the eyes while increasing the power of the imagination.

Meditation Seeing: Assume one of the meditation postures. Do palm healing on your eyes to relax them and then look at some object. Concentrate upon it but keep your mind empty, so as not to stare at, or attach to, the object. For variation and new stimulation, make the object a black dot drawn on white paper; or in a dark room concentrate on the light of a candle. This exercise allows the eyes to function to their maximum ability without strain, insofar as the mind is detached. It also improves one's focusing, self-hypnotic, and psychic powers.

Eyesight Capacity

AT ONE TIME DURING THE late yoga teacher Masahiro Oki's employment in espionage, he was sent to live in the jungle. Since the jungle tenure followed his Zen-like training at the Mongolian lamasery plus the residency at a Yoga ashram in India, his mind and body were prepared for a wholly natural, even primitive, lifestyle. Of this time he said:

In the jungle all my senses became attuned to subtle changes in the environment. No sight, no sound, no smell, no feeling escaped me. My vision became as sharp as a wild animal's. It was as if my eyes had become telescopic, able to detect details far, far away. The jungle experience revealed to me the human being's tremendous capacity to surpass supposed limitations and reach heights of sensitivity previously unknown. Nevertheless, after leaving the jungle and returning to the habits of civilized life, my eyesight collapsed once again.

The lesson, of course, is that the human being's capacity varies according to living conditions and his or her use of him- or herself within those conditions. A person's level of ability, sensitivity, and awareness is a direct consequence of his or her lifestyle within a particular environment.

To heal yourself, you must try faithfully and unflaggingly to better your own mental and physical condition and surrounding circumstances. This requires the courage to discipline yourself to live in a new way, a way that encourages all your senses to function to their maximum capacity. It is important to attend to the whole of you and your environment, lest your devotion be spent in vain on trying to improve one part.

Surely by now you realize that it is unhealthy to wear glasses. Take off your glasses whenever possible. Also, you surely realize that tense eyes are symptomatic of a tense mind. Learn to pacify your mind. And finally, you surely realize that your eyes are one part of the whole body, and that whatever harms the body also harms the eyes and whatever is good for the body is also good for the eyes. Create a lifestyle that is good for the whole body. □