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Better Eyesight

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO THE PREVENTION AND CURE OF IMPERFECT SIGHT WITHOUT GLASSES

July, 1929

Mental Pictures

With imperfect sight, a mental picture of one known letter of the Snellen test card is seldom or never remembered, imagined, or seen perfectly when regarded with the eyes open. By closing the eyes, the same mental picture may be imagined more perfectly. By alternately imagining the known letter as well as possible with the eyes open and the remembering it better with the eyes closed, the imagination improves the vision and unknown letters are seen with the eyes open.

The improvement of the vision is due to a lessening of the organic changes in the eye. When the imperfect sight is caused by opacities of the cornea, a mental picture imagined clearly lessens or cures the disease of the cornea. A large number of cases of cataract in which the lens is more or less opaque have been benefited or cured by the imagination of mental pictures. Nearly all organic changes in the eyeball which lower the vision have been improved to some extent in a few minutes; by devoting a sufficient amount of time, all organic changes in the eyeball, no matter what the cause may be, are benefited or cured by a perfect imagination of a letter, a tree, a flower, or anything which is remembered perfectly.

I do not know of any method of obtaining relaxation or perfect sight which is as efficient and certain as the imagination of mental pictures. It should be emphasized that a good or perfect imagination of mental pictures has in all cases brought about a measure of improvement which is convincing that the imagination is capable of relieving organic changes in the eye more quickly, more thoroughly, more permanently, than any other method.

Throw Away Your Glasses

By W. H. Bates, M.D.

(Editor's Note: The following is a reprint from an article which appeared in Hearst's International, September 1923 [link], which is being republished in Better Eyesight at the suggestion of some of our readers.)

MORE than thirty years ago, not knowing any better and being guided by the practice of other eye doctors, I recommended patients with imperfect sight to throw away their eyes and see with their glasses. Since that time I have made some valuable discoveries which have enabled me to cure people without glasses. The slogan now is: "Throw away your glasses and see with your eyes."

We are rapidly becoming a four-eyed nation. The enthusiasm of the eye doctors is putting glasses on many people who do not need them. Just as soon as we go to the doctor and complain about our eyes or some nervous trouble with our minds and our heads, the stomach or something else, the doctor prescribes glasses. Fifty years ago the number of persons wearing glasses was very much less than it is now. Human nature is such that when one person gets glasses we believe everybody else should do as we do and wear glasses. When prominent people set the fashion the rank and file feel that they must do the same. It is a matter of record in this country with a population of one hundred and ten million or more, that all persons over forty years of age, according to the old theories, should wear glasses.

Some eye specialists have gone so far as to say that all children attending school should wear glasses either to relieve imperfect sight or to prevent their eyes from failing. This matter was considered by the Board of Education of the City of New York in 1912 and much pressure was brought bear to have it done. I was the only physician that went before the Board of Education and recommended the method of treatment which had cured and prevented imperfect sight in school children without the use of glasses.

The craze for glasses has even included nursing babies. It is all wrong, and the evidence has been accumulating through the years that imperfect sight is curable without glasses. Most of us should have an interest in the welfare of every child and get busy and investigate the facts. The medical profession has neglected its duty. They have done noble work in the study and prevention of yellow fever and other conditions, but when it comes to the eyes the doctors can only recommend glasses. My investigations have demonstrated many facts of great practical importance.

In the first place all children under twelve years of age with imperfect sight can be cured without glasses. This is a challenge. If there is one child who cannot be cured by my treatment I am wrong about the whole thing. There is no exception and when a proposition has no exception we call it a truth.

They can be cured not only by me but by their parents, by their teachers, by anybody who has normal sight, but they cannot be cured by people who have imperfect sight. The teachers in the public schools have succeeded by practicing my suggestions with the children, reading the Snellen test card with each eye as well as they can every day, devoting in most cases only a few minutes daily. Those children whose sight is already normal only need to read with normal sight, one minute or less, every day to prevent eye-strain and imperfect sight.

One day I visited a classroom and I said to the teacher: "Can you pick out the children who have imperfect sight?" She selected a number of children that she thought had imperfect sight. In every case her selection was made because of the way the children used their eyes. Some of them squinted, some of them strained in other ways.

I tested the sight of these children and found it imperfect. Then I suggested to the teacher that she ask the children to use their eyes without strain,

without making any efforts to see. I said, "You will find how well they can see when they use their eyes easily, without effort".

Much to her surprise they all read the card with normal vision. Some of these children were wearing glasses. When they removed their glasses at first their sight was imperfect but after resting their eyes by closing them for five minutes or longer their vision became very much improved. In one classroom the teacher found that all her children had imperfect sight; but by showing them how to rest their eyes, by avoiding the strain, and by closing them, the vision of all of them was improved and all obtained perfect sight except one. I learned that this one also obtained perfect sight a few weeks later. It is impossible to cure those children while they are wearing glasses.

In all my enthusiasm I felt that it was not proper for me to interfere with children who were under the care of a physician while wearing the glasses he prescribed. Of course I could not be blamed if the children lost their glasses and got well without them.

It should be emphasized that teachers wearing glasses have a larger percentage of pupils with imperfect sight than have the teachers whose sight is normal and who do not wear glasses. Why is this? The facts are that children, being naturally great imitators, not only consciously or unconsciously practice the strained look of the eyes of the teachers with imperfect sight, but also the strain of all the nerves of the body. For the benefit of the school children no teacher wearing glasses or who has imperfect sight should have charge of children in any public or private school.

Parents wearing glasses are under a nervous strain almost continuously. It can be demonstrated in all cases that the children's eyes tend to strain and that the sight becomes imperfect because most children, if not all, imitate consciously or unconsciously the nervous strain of their parents. The future of our country is in the hands of the children and I believe that we should all make any sacrifice which can be made for their welfare.

It was demonstrated that all persons I tested wearing glasses were curable without glasses. I have demonstrated this fact, that the eyes of all near-sighted persons become normal while looking at a distant blank wall without trying to see. The same is true in all other cases, in far-sightedness, in astigmatism; there are no exceptions.

It can always be demonstrated that when the normal eye with normal sight makes an effort to see at the distance the eye becomes near-sighted; again, no exceptions. When the normal eye strains to see at the near point the eye tends to become and does become less near-sighted and produces a measure of far-sightedness.

The strain in astigmatism can always be demonstrated. One can by will produce in the normal eye any kind of imperfect sight by the necessary strain. The normal eye is always at rest and nothing is done in order to see. If anything is done it is always wrong and always produces imperfect sight. This suggests treatment and prevention. Treatment can only succeed when perfect rest is obtained.

Every physician wearing glasses, like every child, every man, every woman, has to strain to make his eyes fit the glasses. In every case this fact can be demonstrated. Surely the leaders in this movement for the benefit of the eyes of the school children can be or ought to be the medical profession, and I feel that we are lax in our duty when we neglect to study these methods and practice these methods which cure imperfect sight without the aid of glasses.

Imperfect sight is usually contagious. Actors on the stage do not feel the need of glasses. Fancy some operatic star going through a performance wearing strong glasses. The strain would spoil the music.

Many people are afraid of the light. They protect their eyes with dark glasses when they go to the seashore, they use umbrellas, sunshades; in tropical countries special kinds of hats are popular, hats which are supposed to prevent the bad effects of the sun.

Bookkeepers and people who work by artificial light wear contrivances of all kinds to shade their eyes from the artificial light. Is sunlight injurious? It is not. Of course after remaining in a dark room and suddenly going out into the bright sunlight one feels the change, and if one is at all nervous the effect of the light on the eyes is magnified—exaggerated. Some people believe it injures the eyes to read in the bright sunlight with the sun shining on the page. They complain that the light dazzles their eyes.

I know a farmer who for fifteen years had never been able to do a stroke of work out in the sun. He complained that the light blinded him and so he remained in a dark room most of the time and was not as happy as he might have been. He had a large family and in their sympathy they believed as he did and all the time cautioned him to protect his eyes. If someone opened the door suddenly and let in the daylight there was a great rush to close the door and protect the gentleman from the light.

He came to me with his eyes well wrapped up and protected from any light striking his eyes. I darkened the room and had him look down, and when he looked far down I lifted the upper lid and focused a strong light on the white part of his eye—first the artificial light and then the strong light of the sun.

The effect was miraculous. He smiled and walked around the room, looked out the window, put on his hat and walked down the street and came back feeling first rate. Ever afterwards he enjoyed the light instead of suffering from it. All he needed was a little encouragement. Focusing the strong light in his eyes with the aid of the burning glass and doing it right caused him no pain or discomfort whatever.

I know a white man who lives in Borneo, an island in the tropics. This man goes around without a hat. He told me that the natives did not wear hats and had no discomfort from the sun and what was good enough for the natives was good enough for him, and it certainly worked. He has lived there forty years or more and the sun does not do him any harm. Did he ever suffer sunstroke? No. Did anybody else ever suffer sunstroke in Borneo? There is no record. Out in the Canadian northwest in the summer time the sun is very strong and the crops mature in a few months. They raise fine wheat there. Do you hear of anybody being sunstruck working in the wheat fields?

In New York City the papers publish records of sunstroke from time to time during the hot weather. I have been called to attend such cases. Quite a

number of people living in tenement houses have been ill during the very hot weather and I am quite sure that many years ago I believed that I was treating cases of sunstroke. It is very queer but many of these cases never saw the sun and most of them had a breath that we in the days of prohibition might envy.

I do not believe any baseball player or any tennis player in spite of his strenuous exercise on bright sunshiny days has ever suffered from any bad effect of the sun. Most tennis players do not even wear a cap to protect their eyes from the sun and you have to have good eyesight to play a good game of tennis. The light of the sun often shines directly into their eyes when they serve the ball and the experts are able to drive the ball quite accurately in spite of the sun.

Many years ago I listened to the older and the wiser men who treat the eye and they complained that something ought to be done to prevent children playing out in the sun without any hats on. We are more liberal now and treat tuberculosis in children by exposing not only the head and eyes but their whole bodies naked to the sun and I understand it is a very successful treatment. Miners who seldom see the sun always have disease of their eyes. All people who wear dark glasses and avoid the bright sunlight always have trouble with their eyes.

I had a patient once who spent two years in a hospital here in New York many years ago, occupied a dark room and had her eyes bandaged with a black cloth so that not a ray of light could possibly enter her eyes, and at the end of her treatment left the hospital worse than she was before. I cured her by having her practice looking at the sun. At first when she did it she was temporarily blinded. She said that she had no perception of light whatever, but in a few hours she recovered and her eyes felt better.

I undertook to caution her by suggesting that she do it gradually not to get too much of the sun at once, to wait until she became more accustomed to it; but she paid no attention to what I said and went ahead and blinded her eyes again and kept it up every day, with very rapid improvement in her sight, until it was not more than a week or so before she could look straight at the sun without suffering any inconvenience whatsoever. Her vision which had been one-tenth of the normal with glasses became normal without glasses after the sun treatment.

Some scientists in Boston experimented on the eyes of rabbits. They focused the strong light of the sun directly into the eyes and then examined the retina with a microscope and much to their surprise found nothing wrong. They tried strong electric arc lights and found that the retina was not injured. They used every known light on the eyes of these animals and in no case was the light ever an injury.

About ten years ago the Scientific American published a series of articles on the effect of light on the eyes and published that some of the rays were injurious. I tested the facts and found that the man who had written the article had neglected to report the exceptions.

Recently an acquaintance of mine told me that he had seen in the last three months seventy-four cases of disease of the eyes from exposure to strong light from the electric arc. I told the gentleman that he had had an unusual experience, but in my heart I knew he was not telling the truth.

CONCENTRATION

For many years it had been drummed into my mind by my teachers when I first when to school and later by my professors in college, that in order to accomplish things and to make a success of life, one should practice concentration. Recently in New York I received an advertisement from a man who delivers popular lectures, an invitation to attend the lecture with the title "Concentration the Key-note to Success." About the same time one of my patients suffered very much from imperfect sight. The patient bought a book of 500 pages on concentration. He bought the book to improve his memory and sight.

For many years from time to time patients from the faculties of Columbia, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Cornell and other colleges come to me for treatment of their eyes. They all say that not only are they unable to use their eyes for any length of time but that they are also ill in a great many other ways, physically, mentally, with their nerves all shot to pieces. They complain that they have lost the power to concentrate.

By investigating the facts I find that invariably they have been teaching concentration. It does me a great deal of good personally to get square with them because these are the people who cause so much imperfect sight. It can be shown that all persons with imperfect sight are trying to concentrate. I have repeatedly published and described the evidence which proves conclusively that concentration of the eyes is impossible.

Trying to do the impossible is a strain, an awful strain and the worst strain that the eyes can experience. So many people have a theory that concentration is a help and if we could all concentrate we would all be much better off. The trouble is that concentration is a theory and not fact. If you try to concentrate your mind on a part of a large letter of the Snellen test card at ten feet or twenty feet it can be demonstrated that the effort fails and the vision becomes imperfect.

The same is true of the memory and of the imagination. The dictionary says concentration is an effort to keep your mind fixed on a point. I have tested a great many people and not one of them was ever able to accomplish it for any length of time, and the result is always bad with the eyes, with the memory, with the imagination, with the nerves of the body generally. If the professors of concentration were wise they would avoid trying to practice it. It is only in that way that they can avoid trouble.

TREATMENT

If you have imperfect sight and desire to obtain normal vision without glasses, I suggest that you keep in mind a few facts. In the first place the normal eye does not have normal sight all the time, so if you have relapses in the beginning do not be discouraged. First test your sight with a Snellen test card with each eye at twenty feet, then close your eyes and rest them. Cover them with one or both hands in such a way as to shut out all the light and do this for at least an hour, then open your eyes for a moment and again test your sight with both eyes at the same time.

Your vision should be temporarily improved if you have rested your eyes. If you vision is not improved it means that you have been remembering

or imagining things imperfectly and under a strain. With the eyes closed and covered at rest, with your mind at rest, you should not see anything at all—all should be black. If you see colors—red, green, blue, or flashes of light—you are not resting your eyes but you are straining them.

Some people when they close their eyes let their minds drift and think of things which are pleasant to remember, things which come into their minds without their volition and which are remembered quickly, easily and perfectly. Some patients have great difficulty in improving their sight by closing their eyes and trying to rest them. If you fail, get someone with perfect sight to demonstrate that resting the eyes is a help and who can show you how to do it.

When persons with normal eyes have normal sight suffer no pain, discomfort, headaches or fatigue. When a person with imperfect sight closes the eyes and rests them successfully the eye becomes normal for the time being. When such a person looks at the distance and remembers some letter, some color or some object perfectly the eyes are normal and the vision is perfect. This is a very remarkable fact; it has been tested in thousands of cases and one can always demonstrate that it is true.

One of the quickest and most satisfactory ways of improving the sight is a perfect imagination. The normal eye at twenty feet imagines it sees a small letter of the same size as it does at one foot. The eye with imperfect sight on the contrary usually sees a letter at twenty feet larger than it really is.

The normal eye imagines the white of a Snellen test card ate twenty feet, ten feet, as white as it is at one foot. The eye with imperfect sight sees the whiteness of the card less white or a shade of gray.

The white centers of the letters are imagined by the normal eye to be whiter than other parts of the card, while the eye with imperfect sight imagines the white centers of the letters to be less white than the margin of the card. Persons with imperfect sight have been cured very quickly by demonstrating these facts to them and encouraging them to imagine the letters in the same way as the normal eye imagines them.

When reading small print in a newspaper or in a book the normal eye is able to imagine the white spaces between the lines whiter than they really are. The whiter the spaces are imagined the blacker the letters appear and the more distinct do they become.

Persons with imperfect sight do not imagine the white spaces between the lines of fine print that they are endeavoring to read, to be as white as the margin of the page. Persons with imperfect sight do not become able to read fine print until they become able to imagine the white spaces between the lines of letters to be whiter than they really are.

When people with normal vision have normal sight they are always able to see one letter best or one part of a letter better than all the rest. It is impossible to see a whole letter at one time perfectly. One has to imagine different parts best. Persons with imperfect sight, when they regard a line of letters that they do not read, discover that they do not see best one part of the line of letters, but rather do they see most of the line a pale gray with no separation between the letters.

By Central Fixation is meant the ability to see best where you are looking. When one sees a small letter clearly or perfectly it can be demonstrated that while the whole letter is seen at one time, one sees or imagines one part best at a time. The normal eye when it has normal vision is seeing an illusion and sees one letter best of a line or one part of one letter best at a time.

We do not see illusions, they are imagined. Central fixation is a truth to which there are no exceptions and yet it is all imagination. The more perfect the imagination, the more perfect the sight, the more perfect is central fixation.

It is interesting to realize that the truth about vision in all its manifestations, does not obey the laws of physiology, the laws of optics, the laws of mathematics, and to try to explain in some plausible way, why or how all these things are so, is a waste of time, because I do not believe anybody can explain the various manifestations of the imagination.

Most people have an imagination that is good enough to cure them if they would only use it. What we see is only what we think we see or what we imagine we see. When we imagine correctly we see correctly, when we imagine imperfectly we see imperfect. People with imperfect sight have difficulty in imagining that they see perfectly at twenty feet the same letter that they do at one foot or less.

It can be demonstrated that when one remembers a letter perfectly one cannot at the same time remember some other letter imperfectly. The same is true of the imagination and of the vision. This fact is of the greatest importance in the treatment of imperfect sight without glasses. If one can remember perfectly a mental picture of some letter at all times, in all places, the imagination and vision for all letters regarded are also perfect.

One can improve the memory by alternately remembering a letter with the eyes closed for part of a minute or longer and then opening the eyes and remembering the same letter for a fraction of a second. Unfortunately it is true that many people with imperfect sight are unable to remember or imagine mental pictures perfectly. The treatment of these cases is complicated.

One patient when he looked at a white pillow saw it without any difficulty. He thought he saw it all at once. When he closed his eyes he could not remember a mental picture of the pillow.

With his eyes open I called his attention to the fact that he did not see the whole pillow equally white at the same time but that his eyes shifted from one corner that he saw best to another corner or to another part of the pillow and that he successively imagined one small part of the pillow best. With his eyes open he could not see two corners of the pillow best at the same time. He had to see it by central fixation, one part best, in order to see it perfectly. I suggested that when he closed his eyes he remember the pillow in the same way, one corner at a time or one small area best at a time.

He immediately for the first time in his life obtained a mental picture of the pillow. Afterwards he became able to remember or imagine a mental picture of the pillow with his eyes closed by practicing the same methods. He became able to imagine mental pictures of one letter at a time. Always he found that he could not remember the whole letter at once. The strain was evident and made it impossible. By alternately remembering a mental picture of a letter with his eyes closed and remembering the same picture with his eyes open for a short fraction of a second he became able to remember the mental picture of a letter when looking at a blank wall where there was nothing to see, just as well as he could with his eyes closed.

It required many hours of practice before he could remember the letter perfectly when looking anywhere near the Snellen test card, because he could not remember one letter perfectly and imagine one letter on the Snellen test card imperfectly without losing the mental picture. In other words he could not imagine one thing perfectly and something else imperfectly at the same time.

After a patient has become able under favorable conditions to imagine mental pictures as well with the eyes open as with the eyes closed, his cure can be obtained in a reasonable length of time. One patient, for example, could not see the largest letter on the Snellen test card at more than three feet but by practicing the memory of the mental picture of a letter, alternately with his eyes closed and with his eyes open, he was permanently cured in a few weeks.

In the beginning even with the strong glasses the vision that he obtained was one-tenth of the normal, but with the help of the mental pictures he became able to read without glasses at twenty feet a line marked ten on the Snellen test card. School children who have never worn glasses, under twelve years of age, can easily be cured by their teachers in two weeks or less.

It is very important that all patients who desire to be cured of imperfect sight should discard their glasses and never put them on again for any emergencies. It is not well to use opera glasses. Going without glasses has at least one benefit: it acts as an incentive to the patient to practice the right methods in order to obtain all the sight that seems possible.

PREVENTION OF MYOPIA IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

About fifteen years ago I introduced my method for the prevention of myopia in school children in a number of the schools in the City of New York. In one year I studied the records of twenty thousand children who had been tested before and after the treatment. To prove a negative proposition, to prove that something does not occur because something else is done, is a difficult or impossible proposition. When I recommended my treatment for the school children I claimed that every child who used the method properly would see better and that no matter how poor the sight might be or how long the sight had been imperfect the vision would be improved always.

I made the statement that if there were one exception my method was only a working hypothesis at best or a theory, and that I was wrong about everything I said. Since all the children who used the

method had their sight improved it is evident that imperfect sight from myopia was prevented in those children at that time.

I have published from time to time reports on results of my method for the prevention of myopia in school children. These reports are on file in the New York Academy of Medicine and can be consulted by anybody.

In 1912 I read a paper on this subject before the New York County Medical Association in which I made the statement that every child with normal eyes and normal sight who strains to see at the distance becomes temporarily or more continuously near-sighted. There are no exceptions.

If one competent ophthalmologist can prove that I am wrong about one case, I am wrong about all the statements I have made about myopia. This experiment can be performed in the doctor's office or at his clinic and the facts determined with the aid of a retinoscope, an instrument used for measuring the amount of near-sightedness which may be present in the eye.

There were present at this meeting a large number of prominent eye doctors of the City of New York. They knew that I was going to make this statement and issue this challenge because I sent a copy of my paper to these gentlemen two weeks before I read it. It would have been very easy for any of them to have tested the matter and determined whether I was right or wrong, but when the Chairman of the Society called on them to discuss my paper they declined to say anything about it or to publicly deny it.

I have the records of many persons who threw away their glasses and now have perfect sight with normal eyes.

They did it.
Everybody can do it.
YOU can do it.

THE USE OF THE SUN GLASS

In using the sun glass, it is well to accustom the eyes of the patient to the strong light by having him sit in the sun with his eyes closed, and at the same time he should slowly move his head from side to side, in order to avoid discomfort from the heat. Enough light shines through the eyelid to cause some people a great deal of discomfort at first, but after a few hours' exposure in this way, they become able to gradually open their eyes to some extent without squeezing the lids. When this stage is reached, one can focus, with the aid of the sun glass, the light on the closed eyelids, which at first is very disagreeable. When the patient becomes able to open the eyes, he is directed to look as far down as possible, and in this way the pupil is protected by the lower lid. Then by gently lifting the upper lid, only the white part of the eye is exposed, while the sun's rays strike directly upon this part of the eyeball. The sun glass may then be used on the white part of the eye. Care should be taken to move the glass from side to side quickly. The length of time devoted to focusing the light on the white part of the eye is never longer than a few seconds. After such a treatment the patient almost immediately becomes able to open his eyes widely in the light.

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