

To improve your vision, you first need to change the way you think about seeing, as well as the way you go about seeing. Our dependence on sight is enormous, especially in people who see well.

When these people lose their good vision, it can be very traumatic, changing their entire self-concept. In reality, such people have great resources to help them restore their vision, and you will find these resources explained and demonstrated in the exercises included in Natural Vision Improvement.

The eye is one of the most used muscles in our bodies, but it is not simply a mechanical tool. Like every other part of the body, it is profoundly affected by your state of mind. In fact, vision is the sum total of sensation, perception, and conception. Mechanically speaking, your retina has about 126 million light-sensing photoreceptor cells that produce nearly a billion images every minute. Your brain cannot possibly assimilate all of those images to create a picture, so it selects which ones to concentrate on - basically determining how much of a picture you will see.

The British writer Aldous Huxley was a successful 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 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 recognised and interpreted by the mind 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 recognising 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. 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.

Visual habits and patterns of use are amongst the hardest to change; in fact, we are more attached to the way we see than to almost anything else we do. Perhaps this is because our memory consists mostly 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. Memory and imagination are the mind's most valuable tools for improving vision. Anything we have ever seen clearly can be used to stimulate clearer vision. We all know 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 visualisation exercises to take advantage of the mind's tendency to associate clear vision with that which is known and familiar. We can also use visualisation 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. Theories that blame eye structure for the origin of our visual problems are very limited, in that they do not recognise the profound body-mind 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 most important visual organ is the brain. 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. 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. 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, their 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.