

Healthy Vision Habits

by Elizabeth Abraham

‘There are as many hours in the day to use the eyes well as to use them badly.’

W. H. Bates MD

Our eyes, like every other part of our body, function better or worse depending on how we use them. But what are we taught about how to use our eyes? Virtually nothing. All we know is that when we complain of blurry vision – whether we are 8 or 80 – we are given glasses. When we can no longer see as clearly through those glasses, we are given a stronger pair. Glasses compensate for the fact that our vision is blurry, but do nothing to change the reason why we stopped seeing clearly in the first place. We need to learn how to use our eyes well so that they can function well.

What do our eyes need? Our eyes function better when they are relaxed and moving than when they are strained and fixated. Here are a few things you can do to develop good vision habits during your daily life, whether or not you use glasses.

At The Computer

1. Maintain good posture as you sit at the computer in order to allow maximum circulation to your neck and eyes. Have the screen 2 feet away from you, centred in the middle of your visual field, and just below your natural line of sight.
2. Drink water. Electronic equipment can be dehydrating.
3. Our eyes like to change focus often. Take a 30 second break every 15 minutes and a longer one every hour. During these breaks you can:
 - ❖ close your eyes and take 5 deep breaths
 - ❖ look into the distance or at a photo of a distant scene
 - ❖ look at something very close (your shirt button or your nose) then out the window
 - ❖ turn your head from side to side and let your eyes skim over objects in front of you
 - ❖ close your eyes and remember a time when you felt relaxed and calm
 - ❖ get up and stretch.

You will find many ways to give your eyes a break. The part that takes some time and awareness, is developing the habit of remembering to do it!

Walking

1. Look at your surroundings with interest. Many people are lost in thought as they walk, and miss the opportunity to allow their eyes to explore freely at all distances.
2. Count things. Give your eyes and mind a chance to change focus and move from detail to detail as you count objects of the same colour, branches of trees, windows in houses you pass as well as squirrels, dogs, pigeons, or whatever else interests you.
3. Whenever you feel safe doing so, walk without your glasses. Look up ahead even if it is blurry, and notice that everything on either side of you appears to move backwards as you walk forwards.

Playing With Kids

1. Play ball games without your glasses on. If the kids are young and you are very near sighted, sit on the floor and roll balls back and forth. With older children practice throwing balls of various sizes and from different distances, and even learn to juggle if that interests you. Watching moving objects is an excellent way to relax your eyes and get them moving.
2. If you work inside and the kids are in school all day, take them outside after school, on weekends, and whenever you have the opportunity. Go to the beach, to a park, or to an open field where you can fly kites, run, and look far into the distance under open skies. This is a great antidote to the stresses of a sedentary lifestyle.

Eating

1. Don't read or watch TV while eating. Good digestion is important for healthy vision and is encouraged by eating slowly and with awareness.
2. Eat a diet of 80% high water content foods (fresh fruits and vegetables) and 20% concentrated foods (meat, cheese, grains, legumes, pasta etc).
3. Cut down on or eliminate caffeine and sugar as they are dehydrating, and tend to constrict the vascular system and reduce circulation.

Published in Wholife Magazine November – December 2004