

Whether your child is in glasses now, may need them in the future or is exhibiting unexplained difficulties with school work, knowing how the visual system works and how lifestyle and mental and emotional stress as well as physical factors affect it are invaluable tools to preventing and reversing vision problems.

When educators in the past began to tell us that 'the eye is like a camera', they contributed to our misunderstanding about the causes of visual blur. By likening the eyes to a mechanical object, separate and unaffected by the body, the brain that processes the input and the mind that reacts to the end result, they kept us from a total understanding of how the eyes work. It is important to know how vision can change, and the crucial factors in our life that affect eyesight on a daily basis.

Why is it accepted that eyesight can change for the worse, but not for the better? Optometrists and ophthalmologists spend many expensive years in training to treat eye diseases and prescribe glasses. During this education, they are taught that eyesight can only worsen. It is no wonder that many are skeptical of the idea that vision can improve. Yet there are also eye professionals who have seen the results and are supportive and willing to prescribe weakened glasses for clients as their vision improves.

In fact it was an ophthalmologist who first began to explore the causes of visual blur. Why should a body, which is healthy and functional in all other ways, exhibit an inexplicable dysfunction in an apparently healthy organ? In his studies, Dr. William Bates (1860-1931) found that visual blur was related to stress. Not just physical stress, but also mental stress. Through his retinoscope Dr. Bates saw a child's normal eyes turn myopic. Swinging around, he glimpsed a boy from the neighborhood staring at his patient through the window. The momentary stress of being watched while being tested was enough to turn that child temporarily myopic.

To understand how this can happen, it is important to know that functional visual blur is not caused by 'weak' eyes. It is more a situation of the eye muscles being 'too tight', therefore not allowing the eyeball and lens to change shape to change focal length (accommodate). This applies to shortsightedness (myopia) longsightedness (hyperopia), warp across the front of the eye (astigmatism), turning eyes (strabismus) instances of one eye not being used (amblyopia) and 'old-age' reading blur (presbyopia).

A German ophthalmologist, Patricia Joy Werman wrote, "We are living in times of great change...many people are increasingly dissatisfied with mechanical medicine and are deeply affected by the lack of time for explanation and human warmth from doctors. Even established conservative eye doctors are beginning to see that the eye cannot be treated adequately when separated from mental and emotional considerations.

Every day in practice I encounter unexplainable changes in vision. Other areas of the body heal without mechanical intervention; why not eyesight?"

There is usually an original emotional cause, which results in unrelieved physical tension in the eye muscles, switching off of parts of the brain and even personality changes. When all these factors are addressed, then the physical symptoms of visual blur can be worked with in a way that is not only effective now, but will last for a lifetime.

With glasses or contacts as the only answer, poor eyesight either stays the same or worsens. Without these optical crutches human beings would have had to acknowledge and alter the stress factors that cause vision to deteriorate in the first place. I wish to bring the hush-hush issues of emotion, life energy and self-expression back into the picture. Children lacking in self-love, for whatever reason, will seek approval from others.

They contract their bodies and minds into tight knots to ensure faultless academic and social performance. Working with emotional factors even mildly has helped Natural Vision

Nutrition also plays a part. Proteins, vitamins and minerals compose the structure of living eyeballs. If an essential nutrient is missing or toxic substances are entering the body, developing vision can be affected. The brain, processing input from the eyes and other senses, needs proper nutrition and plenty of oxygen. White sugar affects the body's use of chromium, important to muscular function. It is not normal for a child to have visual blur of any kind. The child's environment, internal and external, causes poor vision."

So how can you help your child to regain or keep clear eyesight? The first thing to note is that vision is more than just the ability to perceive black print on white paper. Vision is also about colour, depth, contrast, and comprehension. If your child measures with good acuity but has problems understanding schoolwork, she may have problems with using both eyes together (fusion) or with switching on the parts of her brain needed to process and synthesise the visual information.

As mentioned there is often an emotional cause. Identify the time when the vision first seemed to start to deteriorate. What was happening in the child's life around that time? Myopia is usually related to suppressed fear, hyperopia to suppressed anger and astigmatism to suppressed pain and anger combined. Visual blur is often a response to an occurrence or ongoing situation that the child finds traumatic and wants to 'not see'. Trauma can be very strong, such as some form of abuse, but it can also be from a deceptively mild cause such as starting or changing schools.

Especially in cases where an already sensitive or shy child must adjust to a new house, neighborhood and school, and go through the sometimes difficult task of making new friends. If there is stress, rejection or similar, and parents are often too busy and stressed themselves to help, then the child will internalize his or her feelings, resulting in ongoing physical tension in the body. Once again the result is tense shoulder muscles, tight eye muscles and a visual habit of staring that greatly contributes to blur.

Prevention involves being aware of your child's emotional state, especially when big life changes are taking place. Make time and a safe place for your child to share with you their feelings. Find appropriate ways of expressing feelings; painting and drawing, jumping around shouting and yelling (teaching them when it's appropriate!) and talking things through. Teach them the difference between fear of real things, which is a form of self-protection, and irrational fears, which are a form of self-blockage. Teach them the difference between stored anger from the past which is unreleased, and new anger in the present, which protects us now from inappropriate or hurtful behaviour from others.

Mostly, just teach them that their feelings are acceptable, important and part of life and that the most important thing is to express them appropriately and let them go.

It is interesting to note that the very process of testing eyesight is stressful. Often eye tests give a markedly worse result than what the vision would be measured at if the child were relaxed. So the child can end up in glasses which are already too strong, contributing to the cycle of worsening vision.

When dealing with the physical visual system, a few simple activities can help keep the eyes relaxed and mobile, focusing easily at all distances. Some of the most important activities outlined in Dr. Goodrich's book include:

**Cross-Crawl Dancing:** the two hemispheres of the brain are responsible for different areas of visual perception. Using both sides simultaneously is crucial to clear vision both close and distant, to the movement and imagination necessary for good vision and visual processing. This simple movement is based on 're-patterning' techniques used by kinesiologists and 'Brain-Gym' teachers.

**Magic Nose Pencil:** 'Staring' slows down the quick vibrational 'saccadic movement' that brings light into the eyeball and onto the retina. The slower saccadic movement is the worse visual blur becomes. The Magic Pencil helps the eyes regain fast saccadic movement and is the opposite of staring.

**Near-Far Swing:** Flexes the muscles of accommodation, helping them relax and become more flexible. When done with deep breathing, blinking and relaxation this is a very effective game for near and distant blur.

**Palming:** to rest and refresh the retinal cells, as well as providing a great opportunity for visualizing images which gives 'practice' to the visual brain.