

Preguntas Frecuentes

What is the Bates Method?

The Bates Method is a system of visual re-education that helps people who have poor sight relearn the habits of good sight.

Dr Bates maintained that the key to most visual problems was due to misuse of the visual system. He observed the habits of normally sighted people and the characteristics of normal sight and devised ways to help people with abnormal sight to relearn how to use their eyes naturally.

“All day long use your eyes right. You have just as much time to use your eyes right as you have to use them wrong. It is easier and more comfortable to have perfect sight than to have imperfect sight”.

W H Bates: *Better Eyesight Magazine* April 1922

Que es el Método de Bates:

El Método de Bates es un sistema de re-educación visual que ayuda a quienes tengan problemas de visión a re-aprender los hábitos nuevos para poder ver mejor.

El Dr. Bates decía que la clave a muchos problemas visuales era el mal uso del sistema visual. Observó los hábitos de la gente que no tenía problemas visuales y las características de la visión normal y desarrolló maneras de ayudar a gente con mala visión a re-aprender a usar sus ojos de una manera natural.

“Durante el día, use bien sus ojos . Tiene el mismo tiempo para usarlos bien que para usarlos mal. Es mucho más fácil y cómodo tener una buena vista que tenerla mala.

W H Bates: *Revista*, abril 1922 “*Mejore su vista*”

Who was Dr Bates?

Dr William Horatio Bates was a respected American Ophthalmologist who practised mainly in New York in the late 19th and early 20th century and worked in a number of important teaching hospitals.

He noticed that the vision of many of his patients was at times extremely variable and realised that this meant it could possibly be improved. He later gave up his orthodox practice in order to devote his life to discovering, then showing others, how long sight, short sight and astigmatism could be prevented and improved in children and adults without the use of glasses.

As he developed his method he came to realise there are three key concepts that influence the state of vision: He termed these Central Fixation, Strain and Relaxation.

Publications:

- *The Cure of Imperfect Eyesight without Glasses: Central Fixation Publishing Co.1919K*
- *Better Eyesight Magazines: A journal of vision improvement. 1919 - 1931*

Quien fué el Dr. Bates?

El Dr. William Horacio Bates fué un oftalmólogo Americano que trabajaba en Nueva York a finales del siglo 19 y principios del 20. Trabajó en varios hospitales dando clases de oftalmología.

Observó que la visión en casi todos sus pacientes era extremadamente variable y se dio cuenta que posiblemente se podía mejorar. Después de unos años dejó el trabajo en los hospitales y se dedicó exclusivamente a investigar y después enseñar a otros oftalmólogos como se podía prevenir la miopía, hipermetropía y astigmatismo y como se podía mejorar en los niños y adultos que ya llevaban gafas.

Mientras desarrollaba este método , observó que hay tres conceptos importantes que influyen el estado de la visión en ese momento. Estos tres conceptos fueron, **la fijación central, tensión y relajación.**

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What is Central Fixation?

The concept of Central Fixation has primarily an anatomical and then a neurological basis, and in order to understand it fully it is important to have a basic understanding of how the eye – and particularly the retina – is structured.

Bates observed that:

“The eye is a miniature camera, corresponding in many ways very exactly to the inanimate machine used in photography. In one respect, however, there is a great difference between the two instruments. The sensitive plate of the camera is equally sensitive in every part; but the retina has a point of maximum sensitiveness, and every other part is less sensitive in proportion as it is removed from that point. This point of maximum sensitiveness is called the "fovea centralis," literally the "central pit."

W. H. Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 Pg. 114

The key is to recognise that the *fovea centralis* has an actual, physical presence on the retina and no matter what the condition of the sight, short of physical damage, that point is always there and always receiving light.

When the sight is normal the centre of the visual field is richly detailed and easy to maintain. The mind's interest is continually rewarded with information that is specific and focused and it follows that the process of 'central fixation' is as natural and as effortless as breathing.

When the sight is abnormal the centre of the visual field is invariably indistinct. It no longer provides enough detail with which the mind can easily engage and so there begins a discontinuity; the co-ordination between the mind and the eye is compromised, and the mind is left free to wander while the eyes become orphans.

To compare the two states: relaxed sight and impaired sight, they produce widely different approaches to the use of the eyes, both physically and neurologically. The Bates Method aims to address this disparity of use, and while the compromised eye and mind may be well entrenched in habit, the process of seeing naturally is still imprinted underneath - as a memory or an innate knowing. Additionally the mind can be encouraged to respond in a healthy way to the light that is being received by the fovea, even if it is not yet detailed; in so doing the connection between the fovea centralis and the mind gains in integrity.

The ability to distinguish the centre of the vision implies the ability to distinguish the non-central vision; and recognise that for every single point that is directly observed there are an infinite number of points that are not being directly observed, right to the far edges of your periphery.

In short, Central Fixation is not solely about the centre of your sight: 'Central Fixation' is by definition about the balance of the visual field: that which is central being clearly distinct from that which is not central.

“When the eye possesses central fixation it not only possesses perfect sight, but it is perfectly at rest and can be used indefinitely without fatigue”.

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 117

What is Strain?

Strain is unnecessary and inappropriate effort applied to the task at hand. If you strain to see, the eye muscles become tense, the eye does not move freely and the retina becomes desensitised.

In the early stages of a visual problem, it may be quite easy to let go of the strain: if it has become established it can be difficult to let go. That is why so many optometrists believe that the eye is fixed and vision does not change.

As Bates wrote:

“The eye with normal sight never tries to see. If for any reason, such as the dimness of the light, or the distance of the object, it cannot see a particular point, it shifts to another. It never tries to bring out the point by staring at it, as the eye with imperfect sight is constantly doing”.

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 106

¿Qué es la tension?

La tension es el esfuerzo inapropiado e innecesario aplicado a la actividad que se está realizando en ese momento. Si hay un esfuerzo para ver, los musculos oculars se tensan, entonces el ojo pierde el movimiento y la retina se desensibiliza.

Al comienzo de tener un problema visual, puede ser facil el relajarse, pero si ese problema se a establecido, puede resultar dificil el conseguirlo. Esa es la razón por la cual muchos optometristas creen que el ojo esta fijo y que la vision no cambia.

Bates escribió:

“El ojo que tiene una vision normal, nunca se esfuerza por ver. Si, por alguna razón, como podria ser, una luz demasiado tenue, o un objeto distante, ese mismo ojo no puede ver un punto en particular, se traslada a otro punto. Nunca intenta ver ese objeto por medio del esfuerzo, como hace el ojo que tiene una vision imperfecta, que está en constante tension.

What is Relaxation?

Relaxation is the term used to describe the free and natural response of the eye to light. It is normal and natural for the eye to see, to be interested in the world, to engage with it and respond to visual experiences. When the eye responds to light in this way it is working in accordance with its design and so is relaxed.

The relaxed eye regards the world in depth and detail, but without strain. People with normal sight experience this without trying: people who have had trouble seeing tend to apply effort in order to relax. Such attempts are of course counter-productive and learning to distinguish the difference between effort and effortlessness is the essence of the Bates Method.

“It is as natural for the eye to see as it is for the mind to acquire knowledge, and any effort in either case is not only useless, but defeats the end in view”.

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 106

¿Qué es la relajación?

Relajación es el termino usado para describir la respuesta natural y libre del ojo a la luz. Es normal y natural para los ojos el ver, estar interesado en el mundo, sentirlo y responder a las experiencias visuales. Cuando el ojo responde a la luz de esta manera, esta funcionando de acuerdo a su diseño y por lo tanto esta relajado.

Un ojo relajado mira el mundo con profundidad y en detalle pero sin tensión. La gente con una vision normal experimenta esto sin ningun tipo de esfuerzo: la gente que tiene problemas en ver, tienden a esforzarse para poder relajarse. Haciendolo así es contraproductivo y al aprender a diferenciar lo que es esfuerzandose y sin esfuerzo es la esencia del Método de Bates.

“Es tan natural para el ojo el poder ver como lo es para la mente el adquirir conocimiento, y cualquier esfuerzo hecho en estos casos, no solamente es inutil si no que no tiene sentido”.

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 106

How does the method work?

The method seeks to re-awaken a natural process, so the experience of learning the method is often described as 'un-learning'. This is because our innate ability to see is naturally re-established when harmful habits are dropped.

At first simple techniques are taught that encourage relaxed use of the eyes, and so the student can learn the difference between strain and relaxation. From there it becomes

possible to understand the ways in which the eyesight has been sabotaged - from overuse and lack of adequate visual rest, to learning how to identify mental distractions that undermine the quality of visual experience in each moment.

Vision - Seeing - takes place only in the present and every technique of the method puts a person into the present moment in an easy and relaxed manner. As the vision is a combination of both physical reception of light and its neurological interpretation in the mind, when the eyes and the mind work together the whole visual system begins to rebalance itself.

Do I need to strengthen my eye muscles?

No. Long term misuse of the eyes can lead to poor muscle tone and unco-ordinated movements but the active and dynamic process of normal sight is the cause of good muscle tone, not the other way around.

The Bates Method encourages full engagement of the visual experience, no matter what the condition of sight. Even in cases of severe visual problems, the Bates techniques stimulate the neural pathways between eye and brain, and natural muscle tone will result.

¿Necesito re-enforzar los músculos oculares?

Do optometrists teach the Bates Method?

Generally, no, for a number of reasons:

- Most optometrists learn in college that nothing can be done to improve vision.
- Optometrists are trained to measure vision in a fixed way and to prescribe glasses. Bates teachers state that glasses are no solution to the problem and merely serve as a palliative measure that masks the symptoms of poor sight.
- Optometrists regard vision as a purely physical and mechanical process, regarding the lens and shape of the eye as fixed as if it were made of glass. Bates teachers engage with the person behind the eyesight and regard the function of the eye as a living, organic process that engages physical, mental and emotional aspects of the person who is seeing.
- While there are a few optometrists who acknowledge the value of the method it is still difficult for them to use it properly. The financial structure of conventional optometry requires the optometrist to see 3 or 4 patients an hour and preferably to sell all of them glasses. Many will work directly or indirectly for optical companies, or have set up their business with big loans: they simply cannot afford to spend the time teaching a Method that requires in-depth understanding of their patients.

Where do Bates Teachers come from?

Bates teachers come from all walks of life: they are all people who have been successful in other fields, and who have experienced the benefit of the method for themselves. Many have experience in other areas of education.

¿Quiénes son los profesores del método de bates?

Los profesores del método, son gente que llega a esta técnica cuando han experimentado el beneficio del método por ellos mismos.

Muchos tienen experiencia en otras áreas de la educación.

How long does it take to learn?

The basic fundamentals can be taught in about six to ten lessons and it is recommended that an interested student prepare to undertake about that many in order to receive a solid foundation.

If your condition is slight or of a recent nature often six to ten lessons is all that is needed to get back on track. More long standing conditions commonly require a longer commitment: a person with deeply set habits of strain often needs significant guidance and support when learning how to let go.

Within ten lessons almost all people come to understand what it is that is hampering their vision and can recognise how the Method can help them. Because it is an educational process, no two students respond in exactly the same way, so any prediction on exactly how long it takes for any particular person becomes a collection of educated guesses.

Many patients ask how long it will take to be cured. The answer is that it takes only as long as it takes to relax. If this can be done in five minutes, the patient is cured in five minutes, no matter how great the degree of his error of refraction, or how long its duration.

“All persons with errors of refraction are able to relax in a few seconds under certain conditions, but to gain permanent relaxation usually requires considerable time”.

W H Bates: *Better Eyesight Magazines* September 1919

Does the Bates Method work for everybody?

The method can help anybody who is willing. As the method is educational many factors can enhance or hinder its success. A student who is fortunate enough to be willing to learn and curious often achieves rapid progress. A student with a sceptical nature is commonly hampered.

Essentially the method asks students to become aware of what they are experiencing visually, *exactly* as it occurs, not what they think they should be experiencing. A very busy and active mind is a powerful tool, but it can distract and distort the vision from simple reality.

“Vision is 9/10ths mental and 1/10th physical”

W H Bates: *statement on a vision card*

As the method demonstrates, loss of vision indicates a mind out of control, so bringing the sight and the mind back to the present can be a fascinating experience. Most people who dedicate themselves seriously to the method experience substantial benefit.

Do I have to practise exercises every day?

The key is to understand that the method teaches people to replace poor vision habits with good vision habits. When a person has vision problems we generally find they practise poor vision habits almost all day long.

Once a person starts lessons commonly they practise good vision habits for an hour or so each day, and poor vision habits for the rest of the time - and clearly the balance still needs to shift. The techniques that are taught in the first lessons are essentially tools to raise awareness, so that the difference between good vision habits and poor vision habits becomes clear. Once a person can recognise how to use their eyes well all day long, no techniques are necessary at all.

A good analogy is demonstrated by a rocket ship leaving the gravitational pull of the earth. The gravity represents old habits, and their pull is strong, so it is at the outset, when the rocket builds up speed from its launch, that the most intense activity is required. Once the rocket reaches escape velocity then things are a lot easier, and in parallel, once free of old habits the natural calibration of the eye maintains its own internal checks to health, good sight, and good visual habits.

Some practice is always necessary to learn new skills but essentially you change your approach to seeing in all your activities. Your teacher can help you design a programme that meets your needs.

“All day long use your eyes right...”

W H Bates: *Better Eyesight Magazine* April 1922

Does it become boring?

Feelings of boredom sometimes arise when practising the techniques and this is usually an indicator of one of two things. Always of paramount importance is the active and interested engagement of eye and mind in the surroundings. 'Active and interested' does not mix with bored; the two states are incompatible, so if a person is feeling bored it is certain they are not

feeling interested. If a person is just 'going through the motions' then it is better to stop and do something else.

The second reason boredom sometimes arises is when there is an aversion to change. Learning natural use of the eye means letting go of familiar and often very cosy habits, and sometimes that is hard. Occasionally the mind starts to shut out the possibility and produces boredom as a form of emotional reaction.

Generally if you start feeling bored it means it's time to look at what you're doing in a new way.

What's wrong with using glasses?

Glasses and lenses are usually employed to counteract the poor vision that comes when eyes have developed a refractive error. If you believe, as most optometrists do, that the refractive error is due to heredity or old age then glasses would seem to be the only possible solution. In the Bates Method this whole approach is regarded as completely illogical. As the increase of vision abnormalities coincides with the increasing complexity of society and its distancing from the visual experiences of yesteryear, limiting the factors that cause poor vision to only heredity or old age is an error.

Human beings are as much children of nature as any other species and the fact that large numbers of people need to employ artificial aids in order to see is a tragedy. Culture constantly feeds the dream that the quick fix is the only solution; but forgets to tell you that addressing the cause of the problem is the wiser choice.

As soon as glasses are removed the refractive error is still there, and if glasses are worn continuously over time the poor vision will generally become worse. Essentially what glasses do is lock the eyes into their refractive state and in order to see through your lenses you have to maintain the poor vision that the lenses are designed to correct.

Ultimately it is a choice of approach. If the causes of poor sight can be addressed in a meaningful way that helps you to understand your self, helps your sight and puts you in touch with how to use your eyes well, then there is nothing right about lenses at all.

“As for putting glasses upon a child it is enough to make the angels weep”.

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 85

Do I have to stop wearing glasses?

It is ideal to stop wearing glasses, but at first this may not be possible. The degree of visual difficulty, the personality, the tasks and jobs in which the eyes are to be used are all factors which influence the approach in how to reduce and finally remove the need for glasses.

Even people with high prescriptions are often pleasantly surprised at how much they can see once they start learning how to use their eyes well, and commonly wear their glasses much less than they thought possible.

An additional option for high prescription wearers is to obtain reduced prescription lenses. These are especially useful when they are needed for critical tasks or where they are strong enough to meet a legal requirement, like driving.

The essential approach is to learn how to use your eyes in a more relaxed way. You can still do this to some extent while wearing glasses - and as they begin to feel restricting you will naturally want to take them off.

If you are working with a teacher you can discuss your options and look for the approach that meets your needs. The experience of coming out of glasses is unique to each individual.

“Doing without glasses a little longer each day is a good way to begin. If one has been wearing glasses for a long time, it is much easier for the patient to gradually do without them, if he is not under treatment for the removal of glasses”.

W H Bates: *Batter Eyesight Magazine* September 1929

What about laser surgery?

Some people get good results from laser surgery, others end up no better off and there are also some real horror stories; cases where serious problems have arisen that cannot be reversed.

Apart from the risks, the justification for using surgery is no different from the underlying philosophy of using lenses: it is still suppressing symptoms rather than revealing the cause. There is clear evidence for this in the number of surgical cases which appear to achieve successful correction but then regress over time.

From the Bates perspective, "tattooing your prescription onto your eyeball" is a really bad choice, as it precludes you from ever experiencing your natural sight unhindered.

Isn't it normal for sight to deteriorate as you grow older?

No. The loss of focusing ability in later life is mainly due to acquired habits of strain and can be both prevented and reversed. Many quite elderly people have regained good near vision and more flexible focus after many years of depending on glasses to read.

Most cases of poor near vision that arise around the age of 40, if caught early, can be easily turned around, but often students going through this experience are surprised that the poor habits that led to the deterioration began many years earlier - sometimes as early as childhood.

"The first patient that I cured of presbyopia was myself".

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 216

Can the method help with eye diseases?

Eye diseases are indications of poor general health and should always be treated constitutionally.

Damaged and diseased eyes are prone to excessive strain, as any impairment of vision is often exaggerated by the disease. As strain is commonly accompanied by extra tension, the Bates Method can help to promote healing through relaxation of the muscles around the eyes and face.

Bates teachers always aim to work in co-operation with physicians.

"Wonderful cures have been accomplished, after all other methods had failed, of many eye diseases by the proper use of the imagination".

W H Bates: *Better Eyesight Magazine* October 1924

What about lazy eyes and squints?

Imbalances between the eyes can be improved by subtle and effective techniques based on relaxation and brain integration. Dr Bates' principles of relaxation and central fixation can be applied to binocular problems in a variety of ways and although it is often stated by optometrists and doctors that these problems cannot be rectified unless treatment is given early in life, Bates teachers have recorded many remarkable successes at all stages of life.

Can the method be used with young children?

Yes. Children from about five years can work very happily with a teacher. Younger children can be helped by their parents with a teacher's guidance.

In any situation where a child is experiencing visual difficulty it is always most helpful if the parents or guardians learn the method along with the child, even if they already have very good vision. As a child absorbs their habits of seeing from the surrounding environment, the family's involvement is often very effective in counteracting the core habits of strain.

Permanent relaxation can be obtained by any of the methods used in the cure of errors of refraction, but in the case of young children who do not know their letters these methods have to be modified.

Such children can be cured by encouraging them to use their eyes on any small objects that interest them. There are many ways in which this can be done, and it is important to devise a

variety of means so that the child will not weary of them. For the same reason the presence of other children is at times desirable.

“There must be no compulsion and no harshness, for as soon as any method ceases to be pleasant it ceases to be beneficial”.

W H Bates: *Better Eyesight Magazine* March 1930

Is the method only for people with poor sight?

It is far easier to prevent the onset of vision problems than it is to reverse them, and we would always recommend a person learn the habits of good sight consciously, before they lose them unconsciously. Understandably few people have the incentive to come to lessons until there is already a problem, but the nature of sight is best maintained, rather than having to be saved. Apart from the value of prevention, 'normal' sight can be improved still further and many people with good sight have experienced such benefits as improved concentration, faster reading, better all-round co-ordination, sleep, digestion and sense of calm.

“Since central fixation is impossible without mental control, central fixation of the eye means central fixation of the mind. It means, therefore, health in all parts of the body, for all the operations of the physical mechanism depend upon the mind. Not only the sight, but all the other senses—touch, taste, hearing and smell—are benefited by central fixation. All the vital processes—digestion, assimilation, elimination, etc.—are improved by it. The symptoms of functional and organic diseases are relieved. The efficiency of the mind is enormously increased. The benefits of central fixation already observed are, in short, so great that the subject merits further investigation”.

W H Bates: *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* 1920 pg 122

Will using computers harm the eyes?

Computers can be a strong stimulus to practice strain, but it's not inevitable. The key to choice in avoiding the strain is to understand that it is not the computer that does anything to you, but it is in what you do to yourself in response to working on the computer.

The first issue is understanding the nature of the visual process when looking at a screen. The screen itself contains information that is occupying the mind, and it becomes possible to be so occupied that the vision is forgotten. The eyes become used and over-used, merely as transmitters of information, glued to a screen and presenting the mind with words and graphics for it to interpret. The pure process of simply seeing for the joy of it is largely forgotten, and with the fixed distance of the screen the eyes are left with precious little of what they expect: colour, movement, variety and depth - so it's no wonder they start feeling pretty neglected.

Establish habits where you take frequent breaks: looking around the room only momentarily can produce instant relief. Make your work environment beautiful to look at: plants, bright colours, pictures. Even toys and objects of curiosity dotted around the desk can provide a much needed alternative focus for the eyes to play with. Try to situate your desk so you can easily look out of a window.

If you can touch type, practise it so you can happily type with your eyes closed, or looking elsewhere. If you can't touch type, it is a skill well worth learning.

By learning to keep the eyes relaxed while working, many problems can be avoided.

How can I find out more?

If you are just starting out on the method there is a wealth of information now available on the Internet, much of it free. On this site there are descriptions of techniques to learn, and a section that points you to further resources - downloads (Many early books on the method are out of copyright and can be downloaded for free), discussion lists, a vision related shop and links to other useful sites on the Internet.

If you are serious about improving your vision it's recommended you find a teacher to make sure you get started on the right track. The method is prone to misinterpretation and a teacher can give you instant feedback in the moment to clarify any misunderstandings.

For further reading, the following titles are particularly good in introducing the Bates Method and how it works.:

- *Better Eyesight Without Glasses* by Dr W H Bates
This title is still readily available. Note that it is an abridged version of the original classic:
- *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* by Dr W H Bates (1919)
Bates' original volume where his system of eye re-education was first presented fully to the public. This is occasionally available from Internet second hand outlets, but may also be downloaded as a PDF from the [resources section](#)
- *Better Eyesight Magazines* by Dr W H Bates, Emily Bates et. al. (1919 - 1930)
After Bates published 'Perfect Sight' he went on to produce a regular magazine over a period of eleven years. In here is a wealth of information, broadened by the ongoing research and experience. This 700+ page volume can be both purchased as a download (printable and searchable) and as a printed and edited volume.
- *The Art of Seeing* by Aldous Huxley
The Bates Method as explained by the well known author, Aldous Huxley.
- *The Bates Method* by Peter Mansfield
A modern interpretation of the method.

[The Bates Association for Vision Education](#) also supplies information and a teachers list.