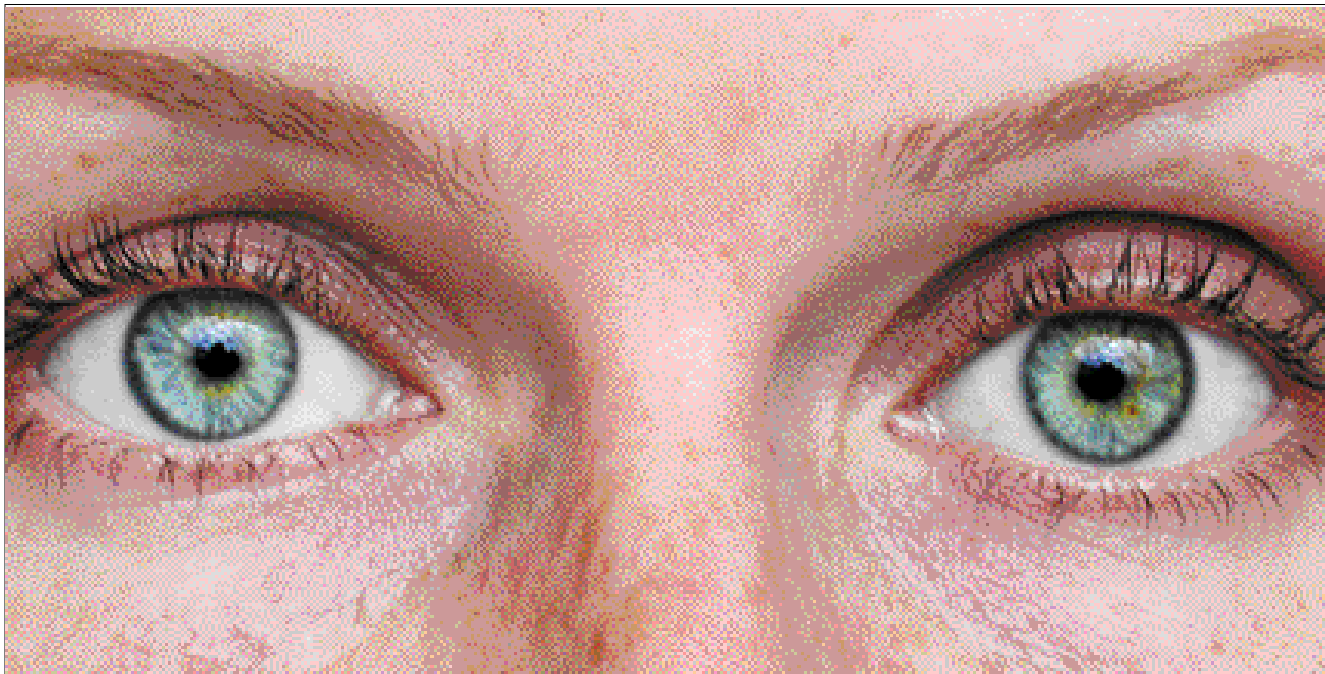


BODY & HEALTH



Leo Angart has developed a system of physical exercises based on Eastern philosophy that he believes will improve eyesight without the help of glasses or surgery.

BELIEVING IS SEEING

BY DAVID BARBER

Seeing is believing, the old saying goes. But for vision-training advocate Leo Angart, the opposite is equally true: Believing is seeing.

Most vision problems — nearsightedness or far-sightedness, astigmatism or a host of other factors — can be corrected with eyeglasses or contact lenses.

Many people start life with optimal sight but find their vision deteriorates as they get older, requiring reading glasses or bifocals. (The medical term, presbyopia, literally means “old eyes.”)

More recently, laser surgery has become a popular means to correct vision problems and do away with corrective lenses altogether.

But laser surgery carries some risk, such as a loss in night vision. And because it's still a relatively new procedure, we aren't yet sure of its long-term effects.

For Mr. Angart, these methods may correct a vision problem, but they don't solve it.

And he believes glasses or contacts generally become a crutch that ultimately make the vision problem worse, not better.

To achieve perfect vision, he believes, all it takes instead is a little effort — and a little faith.

The effort comes through a series of simple physical exercises — small calisthenics for the eyeballs.

The faith part comes through some mental exercises of visualization that draw on Eastern philosophy. He likes to call his approach “tai chi for the eyes.”

“It's like if you walked around with your arm in a sling,” he says.

“If you do that for too long and don't exercise your arm, it will get weak.”

Eyeglasses or lenses, he says, can become like the crutch or sling that prevent the eyes from doing their work effectively.

“There are no bones in the eyes,” he points out. “It's all muscles.”

And like our other muscles, the eyes need regular workouts. “Eyes are like cars,” he says.

“The older they get, the more maintenance they need.”

But for him, the mental side of the equation is even more important.

“Your eyesight is a reflection of your overall physical well-being, your emotional well-being and your energy,” he says.

Most vision problems, he is convinced, are not the result of a deficiency in the eyes themselves — there is in fact nothing wrong with the structure of the cornea or the lens or the eyeball — but instead, the problem lies in how the brain interprets the information the eyes are receiving.

For vision-training advocate Leo Angart, surgery will not solve poor eyesight. To achieve 20/20, he believes all you need is practice — and a little faith

“We need to deal with it in the brain, not in the eyes,” he says.

“It's a software problem, not a hardware problem.”

His approach may seem a little far-fetched, but Mr. Angart himself is probably the best example of the success his methods can achieve.

A Danish-born former business consultant who has spent much of his working life in the Far East, Mr. Angart was severely nearsighted and wore glasses for 26 years.

Then about 10 years ago, after doing eye exercises and some research and work with neuro-linguistic programming — at its simplest, a kind of self-hypnosis — he regained his 20/20 vision in short order.

He put away his glasses and has never worn them since.

For the past 10 years he has been developing and refining his methods for a book (*Improve Your Eyesight Naturally*) and a Web site (www.vision-training.com) while giving workshops all over the world to help others find, or at least approach, the same success he has achieved.

Which is how I come to find myself at a small downtown conference centre with Mr. Angart and about eight other participants in the first workshop he has given in Toronto. Mr. Angart has come at the invitation of Impagination Inc., an award-winning Toronto-based design and marketing firm whose founder, Loral Carr, heard of his method and attended a workshop in London, England, last year.

She was so impressed with her own vision improvement, and with the way his Eastern approach fits with her studies as a yoga teacher, that she decided to sponsor a two-day workshop here.

I'll be a good test case, not to say a challenge, of Mr. Angart's methods. While the vast majority of people with eye problems are nearsighted, I'm the opposite, far-sighted, which already puts me into a tiny minority.

Also, I was born with one eye slightly turned in — which despite corrective surgery at age two has remained a “lazy eye” (amblyopia, to use the fancy term).

This means my better eye, the left, does more work than the lazy eye, the right, which half the time is goof-

ing off and not paying attention.

Glasses have certainly helped correct these problems, but when I get tired, especially from too much reading, it's my left eye that really feels the strain.

After wearing glasses all my life — well, since I was 18 months old — I'm a little skeptical that Mr. Angart and his vision training will be of any help.

OK, more than a little skeptical. But I'm game to try.

An engaging and entertaining speaker, he begins the workshop with an overview of his philosophy — a vision of his vision, if you will — and a brief biography of his own experience.

Soon, though, we are right into the first set of exercises.

Some of these are a more concerted form of the tests an optometrist or ophthalmologist might use to check your vision — reading lines on an eye chart, following the tip of a pen moving across or up and down using only the eyes without moving the head, alternating focus between a near object and the distance.

One, which Mr. Angart calls the Tibetan Wheel, looks particularly odd when I glance over at others while they do it as well.

Printed on the page, the wheel has spokes that radiate from the centre like the hour markings of a clock.

Holding it a mere fraction from the tip of the nose — so it's impossible to keep in focus — the idea is to follow with the eyes from the centre to the outer edge of each spoke and back, up and down and around the clock in each direction.

Between rotations comes “palming,” which involves rubbing the palms briskly to warm them, then placing them over the eyes to block out the light.

In Eastern philosophy, Mr. Angart explains, this provides a direct connection to the eyes from the centres of energy — or “chi” — that reside in the palms.

I'm not sure about that, but after going nearly cross-eyed on the Wheel, it does sure feel nice to have the warmth of skin against my tired eyes.

Though ultimately relaxing, the Tibetan Wheel is an exhausting workout, and Mr. Angart cautions

against doing it more than a few times a day, with at least a two-hour break in between.

Over the two days other exercises follow, both physical and abstract. I'll admit the more esoteric ones — such as visualizing different “colours” of energy infusing the eyes — seem less effective to me.

Maybe I'm not yet a complete convert.

But one of the more concrete exercises has actually been a tremendous help.

After learning of my lazy eye, Mr. Angart is convinced I'm not actually using both eyes to produce a 3D stereoscopic image.

At first this seems unlikely to me. After all, it's not as though I'm actually blind in my right eye.

It must be doing some work.

But to prove it, he has me hold a string to the tip of my nose while he holds the other end a metre or so away.

In this situation, most people seeing properly in stereo would see the image of two strings converging in the distance like train tracks to form a V or sometimes an X.

At first, I see only one string and can't make the other image appear. I can see the string with either eye if I close one, but I can't see the V or the X with both eyes open.

Everyone else in the workshop sees this easily. I feel like the class dunce.

But slowly, if I squint a bit and unfocus my eyes (this is easy without my glasses) and concentrate, I have a moment where I see two strings.

“There you go,” Mr. Angart says. “Now you're seeing in proper 3D. Do that a hundred times.”

By which he means do it several times every day until I “reprogram” my brain to properly engage my right eye.

I can't really speak to the validity of his theory, but in practice I will tell you it works.

I've tried to do the string exercise at least once every day, sometimes more, for more than a month.

Like my fitness regimen, I don't always manage it. But I do notice the difference.

It may look a little silly, but on those days when I do stare down my nose at a piece of string looking for the train tracks, my left eye feels much less strained.

And for that alone, I'm grateful.

Maybe all I need to get rid of my glasses altogether is just a little more faith.

National Post

Impagination will hold another Toronto workshop with Leo Angart on Oct. 14 and 15, with a “Magic Eyes” session for children on Oct. 13 and 16. For more information or to register online, see www.vision-training.com

DOCTOR'S ORDERS



Watch out for those pot-bellies

BY STANLEY HAZEN

Pot-belly pigs may be cute. Pot-belly stoves may be warm. But a paunch or protruding abdomen on a man or woman poses a deadly threat to the heart.

What makes it deadly? Well, the fat that develops in the abdomen is essentially different from the fat you find in other parts of the body.

Your pot-belly isn't just a passive weight, hanging over your belt. It's an active gland going to war with your heart.

Both sexes are at risk.

The pot-belly, beer gut, or bay window is mostly a male phenomenon in humans under the age of 50. But once women reach menopause, they can quickly catch up.

Belly fat is sometimes called central fat. It's not the soft adipose on the outside of your abdominal wall (the fat that you can grab with your hand), but the hard, visceral fat that envelops your internal organs.

Visceral fat is scary. Here's why.

While the rest of your body goes about its daily business, your visceral fat is enacting its own agenda. At the top of that agenda is what should be one of the most sinister words in any language: inflammation.

Inflammation is the link between fat and coronary heart disease and diabetes (and possibly cancer, Alzheimer's and other diseases).

Ordinary fat is metabolically inactive. It's a storage medium. A place for your body to park its excess energy. By contrast, visceral fat is metabolically a boil. As you develop a pot-belly, your whole body chemistry changes.

Levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, or “good” cholesterol, drop, and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, or “bad” cholesterol, and triglyceride levels climb. Plaques of gooey lipids begin forming in the walls of your coronary arteries.

At the same time, visceral fat begins pumping out hormones and proteins that help inflame these gooey plaques. Once inflamed, the plaques become unstable.

They can burst like pustules, and spill their contents into your coronary arteries. White blood cells and other substances quickly gather at the site of the break, plugging the artery like a wad of wet tissue.

In a very short time, you're having a heart attack. As if promoting coronary artery disease weren't bad enough, visceral fat also leads you to heart disease by way of diabetes.

That's because the cellular composition of visceral fat includes an abundance of white blood cells. The importance of these white blood cells is that they direct other cells to turn on and off.

So when a person develops a pot-belly, he or she ends up with a new metabolism that is not as sensitive to recognizing insulin.

When signaling by the insulin receptors in the body becomes blunted, insulin cannot as readily regulate glucose metabolism. This may lead to diabetes.

If you've got a pot-belly, now is the time to start getting rid of it. Don't forget, visceral fat isn't the soft stuff on the outside of your abdomen.

It's inside your abdominal wall. You may hit your pot-belly with your fist and say, “hard as a rock.” You may even have perfectly skinny arms and legs. But the danger lies within.

The good news is, a recent study has shown that exercise can halt and reverse the build up of visceral fat.

A mere 30-minute walk, six days a week, can stop your pot-belly from getting any bigger than it is right now.

Add more exercise to that, and your pot-belly actually begins to shrink. All it takes is the equivalent of jogging about five kilometres a day.

Of course, the best idea is to start early and begin exercising before your abdomen can even think of becoming potty.

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