

Do-It-Yourself Vision Training

The American Optometric Association's Sports Vision Section (www.aoa.org/x767.xml) provides the names of reputable vision therapists, some of whom offer at-home programs. Dr. Seiller, of the Visual Fitness Institute, has a CD-ROM that includes tests to diagnose visual problems and 20 sessions of eye exercises (\$129, www.vizualedge.com). Thomas Wilson, an optometrist who has worked with Olympic skiers and professional baseball players and is the author of "Sports Vision: Training for Better Performance" (Human Kinetics), says the following routine is applicable to most sports. Perform it several times a week for about 10 weeks, then intermittently every few weeks thereafter to keep your eyes toned.

Near and Far Tennis Balls (improves focus):

Place a tennis ball on the floor 4 inches in front of you and another one 2 to 3 feet away. Look at one ball and then the other, making sure to focus both eyes. Repeat 30 to 40 times, moving the second ball farther away as focusing becomes easy.

Beads on a String (aligns images seen by each eye):

Take three beads half an inch in diameter and tie them into a 10-foot length of string at varying distances. Fix one end of the string to an object at eye level; pull the other end taut and raise it to the bridge of your nose. Focus on the first bead. You should see two strings going to all of the beads and crossing at each one. Repeat with each bead.

Spaghetti in a Straw (improves hand-eye coordination and peripheral vision):

Have a partner hold a straw horizontally about 16 inches from your nose. Without looking at your hands, try to thread two pieces of uncooked spaghetti simultaneously into each end of the straw. Repeat with the straw held at different heights.

Beanbags From Behind (improves reaction time and peripheral vision):

Have a partner stand behind you and toss a beanbag while calling "left side" or "right side." Increase the difficulty by trying to catch the bag while also focusing on the tennis balls (first exercise).