

15. Going Peripheral

Have you ever seen one of those nature documentaries, and noticed what happens when an animal gets startled? Its eyes widen, and its fur sticks up on end. It freezes for a second, and then disappears into the night. Converted into human terms, you might say that in a stressful situation your eyes widen, your palms start to sweat, you freeze for a second, you feel like you want to run off into the night, but you know that you can't and instead have to stay in that situation until it's over.

Eyes and vision

Your eyes, or rather, the external and internal muscles controlling their movement and appearance, can display a vast range of emotions, easily interpreted by other people as well as animals. You know if someone is genuinely happy not by how wide their smile is, but if their eyes are 'smiling' too.

Similarly you can see if someone is experiencing an extreme level of performance arousal, positive or negative, by looking at their eyes and the muscles around them.

How your eyes function and indeed what you see and how you interpret what you see is different when experiencing a high level of performance arousal (+5 or -5), compared to when performance arousal is low (+1 or -1), or non-existent (0). This ocular reflex is controlled by the Autonomous Nervous System, mentioned earlier, but can also come under your conscious control.

Tunnel vision

When your Sympathetic Nervous System is highly active, for example when experiencing the 'Fight or Flight' response, you can experience a sort of tunnel vision. In this state, your eyes make swift, jerky movements as a natural way of looking for 'the enemy'. When this happens, objects directly in front of you are perceived as more prominent, whilst objects to the side of your main focus, and out in the periphery are often not registered.

Applying the brakes

If you are in a situation where you need to reduce the amount of performance arousal you are experiencing, or counter the effects of anxiety, taking conscious control over your eyes can help. By using the technique of Going Peripheral, you can lessen the activation of your Sympathetic Nervous System (the accelerator pedal), and trigger your Parasympathetic Nervous System (the brakes), creating a calming effect on your body and mind.

To Go Peripheral, follow these steps:

1. Look straight ahead.
2. Relax your eyes – or even close them slightly.
3. Focus on objects or the walls at the extreme left and right of you, without moving your eyes.
4. Maintain this attention to your peripheral vision for as long as you feel necessary, but at least 30 seconds.

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Going Peripheral can aid you in restoring control to your body and mind if you feel over-excited, nervous or anxious in performing and non-performing situations alike.

This technique has its strongest effect when sitting, reclining, or incorporating the standing posture explained in the first 4 steps of the Qi Gong Basic Horse-stance Standing Meditation exercise in Chapter 26.



15. Exercise: The Going Peripheral Experiment

Try Going Peripheral now using the steps given above.

What effects does Going Peripheral have on you?

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You may notice that your breathing slows down, and that you begin to relax muscles in the rest of your body.

If you can't 'Go Peripheral' immediately, don't worry. It may be a new technique for you which might require a little practise. In a short time though, Going Peripheral will be an effective technique that you will be able to execute at any time in any situation to alleviate anxiety, and reduce your overall level of performance arousal. If your performance situations require physical and mental calm, Going Peripheral can help you to get closer to The Zone.

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