

YOGA FOR YOUR EYES!

by Alice Smellie

BEFORE starting a workout, I stretch — as one must. I sit and close my eyes, then open them and move my eyeballs up and down and side to side. After a few minutes, I pop my hands over my face. That's my exercise done. The day can begin.

Sound a bit odd? Not as much as you might think. I'm tapping into a new trend for working out the eyes, known as eye yoga.

Potential benefits are said to be incredible. It is believed to relieve eye dryness, eye strain — suffered by up to 90 per cent of computer users — and alleviate the itchiness of hay fever. Some suggest workouts can improve long or short-sightedness — though experts do not agree.

So, how does it work? Six muscles move the eyeball, and eye yoga advocates suggest we ought to be exercising these in specific ways.

'Eye yoga has long been thought to help eye health,' says yoga trainer Lindsay Jay of Gymcube.com.

'My clients were surprised, but it makes sense yoga might improve the eye's strength and flexibility as well as the body's.'

Optician Dilip Darjee from Silhouette eyewear, which has developed a workout to help tired eyes, says: 'Research has suggested that eye exercises can help reduce strain. Try doing them for a week.'

I'm a cheerful wearer of glasses and contact lenses, but my eyes are often dry from staring at my computer screen, and they are made worse by hay fever.

I gave six exercises a go for a week and was astonished by the significant difference to my eyes.

MORNING STRETCH

THEORY: Wake up with an eye muscle workout.



THE EXERCISE: Sit cross-legged and concentrate on breathing. Look up and down five times (above) and close your eyes. Open your eyes, look left and right five times, then close again.

Open your eyes, look to the upper right and the lower left five times (main picture), then close. Open again, look to the upper left and lower right five times and close. Rub your palms together then lay them on your eyes. This warms and moistens them.

Experts warn that if you feel any discomfort doing the exercises, you must stop immediately.



Don't laugh. It really might help you see better

DOES IT WORK? I enjoy the deep breathing. It's like meditation, though I just feel sleepy. But it's an effort for my eyes at first — they feel as though I'm weight lifting. It gets easier.

I'm not convinced by benefits beyond waking up a bit. Perhaps my eyes look slightly brighter.

EXPERT: 'This is a relaxing start to the day and may wake you up,' says ophthalmologist Andrew Bridges, a director at Leightons opticians. 'Warming hands and placing them on the eyes may help stimulate tears and lubricate dry eyes.'

SUPERPOWER SIGHT

THEORY: By focusing on objects at different distances, you exercise your eyes as well as providing relief from eye strain.

THE EXERCISE: Hold a pen at arm's length. Focus your gaze on the tip of the pen and slowly bring it closer to your nose.

Repeat five to ten times. This helps to improve focus over time — it is called convergence and strengthens the eye's muscles.

DOES IT WORK? Though I've been warned this is no panacea to reading glasses, I'm sure I notice a slight, but distinct improvement in close-up focus over a week.

EXPERT: 'This is great,' says Andrew. 'Day by day, aim to have the pen in focus closer towards your nose. Remember, this is not going to improve your long or short-sightedness.'

REST AND REFRESH

THEORY: Relaxes and rejuvenates the eye muscles and stimulates fluid circulation.

THE EXERCISE: Close your eyes and rub palms firmly together



until they are warm. Place arched palms gently over your eyelids without directly touching them (above). Repeat three times.

DOES IT WORK? Eyes feel refreshed and adding in deep breathing feels like having a midday nap.

EXPERT: 'This may be a good idea,' says Andrew. 'It might

work even better with a warm compress placed over the lids. Then gently massage to stimulate oil glands.'

THINK, BLINK

THEORY: Many of us don't blink as much as we ought to. This moisturises and relaxes eyes.

THE EXERCISE: Press eyelids together firmly and tense eye muscles (below). Hold for three seconds then quickly release.

Blink a few times and repeat at least four times.

DOES IT WORK? I can't help thinking about the wrinkles that may form, but my eyes feel less dry afterwards.

EXPERT: 'This will lubricate the lid, but don't squeeze too hard as it won't help with certain eye conditions,' says Andrew.

'Extra pressure on the eyes may temporarily increase pressure on the fluid in the eyes.'

'Prolonged rubbing may be an issue for those with glaucoma or at risk of glaucoma. Also avoid prolonged and vigorous rubbing if you have corneal issues.'



CRYING CLEAN OUT

THEORY: Making eyes water will clean them out, flushing away any debris.

THE EXERCISE: Do straight before bed. Sit cross-legged on a cushion, 1m away from a lit candle and stare at the flame until your eyes start stinging and tears run down. Then relax for ten minutes.

DOES IT WORK? I can't get this to work. My eyes don't water and just feel tired.

EXPERT: 'This will trigger tears, but I'm not sure I'd advocate looking directly at a light source,' says Andrew.

BANISH PUFFINESS

THEORY: Fluid retention causes puffy eyes. When you sleep deeply you don't blink and fluid accumulates around your eyes.

THE EXERCISE: Blink vigorously for 30 seconds to dissipate fluid and get rid of puffiness.

DOES IT WORK? I blink for twice the amount of time, but am not sure this gets rid of my puffy eyes. However, it does make my dry and itchy morning eyes feel much more comfortable, which makes sense as the eye is being moisturised.

EXPERT: 'Blinking replenishes the tear film and removes debris from the surface of the eye,' says Andrew. 'It will certainly help moisturise dry and tired eyes.'

■ VISIT silhouette.com for a selection of more exercises.

by Antonia Hoyle

THERE can be few women who haven't come across Forever Living. Perhaps a friend has badgered you to buy the company's aloe vera beauty and nutrition products or you know someone who is a Forever Living sales person.

Among any group of mums of small children on Facebook, there is bound to be someone extolling the benefits of Forever Living — whether it's the merchandise or the enviable lifestyle that comes with selling it.

Certainly, when Candice Kiddle wanted a job to fit around the demands of motherhood, becoming a rep for Forever Living seemed the perfect solution. Selling to friends on Facebook would mean no commuting or time away from her two small children.

But within four months of signing up, Candice was a neurotic wreck, working until 2.30am, addicted to her smart phone and — ironically — alienated from her family.

'By the time I quit I felt betrayed and ashamed of the lies I'd told to try to get ahead,' says Candice. 'My partner, Sam, said he no longer recognised me, our son would beg me to get off the phone and, despite working flat out for four months, I'd barely made a penny.'

It's a criticism echoed by many women across Britain, who feel they have been manipulated into nothing more than a get-rich-quick scheme that brought them precious little financial reward.

Last year, Forever Living was criticised by the Advertising Standards Authority for making false claims about the health benefits of its products — which have been sold as a cure for everything from diabetes to Crohn's disease. It was also warned not to use health professionals in its promotional materials.

More recently, it hit the headlines after The Medicines And Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency launched an investigation after it was revealed NHS staff were moonlighting as sales people.

So, what is Forever Living? And does it deserve its terrible reputation?

SELLING ON FACEBOOK

FOUNDED in Arizona in 1978, the business sells health and beauty products based on the plant, aloe vera. It has grown exponentially and nowhere more so than in Britain, where sales topped £120million last year — a rise of 70 per cent from 2014.

Products are sold directly to individuals through sales reps, called Forever Business Owners (FBOs). In the beginning, FBOs touted their wares door-to-door and parties, but they now plug them on Facebook.

Recruits are charged an initial outlay of £200 for a box of aloe vera products, and are encouraged to recruit other sellers. Most of the company's 6,400 UK reps are women.

Candice, who's 24 and from Maidenhead, Berkshire, signed up last August when her son, Ashton, was three months old (she also has an older son, Harrison, four), after hearing about the company through a fellow mother at her antenatal group.

RUNGS OF THE LADDER

FOREVER Living is a form of multi-level marketing (MLM) — a complex system in which new recruits are brought in by existing sales reps.

Though Forever Living FBOs are effectively considered self-employed, they still operate under the umbrella of the company, progressing through nine sales levels, from 'assistant supervisor' to 'double diamond manager', according to how many people they can recruit and products they sell.

The level of command is called an 'upline' and for every rung of the ladder people climb, they get paid a higher percentage of the sales profits than the person beneath them.

PROMISED RICHES

INCOME varies massively depending on your position in the chain. A supervisor makes 38 per cent profit on the sale of each aloe product, for example, and an estimated £250 a month, while a manager earns 48 per cent.

FBOs also receive a bonus based on 'their' team's sales and a bonus when recruits buy products — each of which is greater the more senior they are.

The company claims a supervisor will earn an average £250 a month, a manager between £800 and £2,000 a month and a diamond manager upwards of £350,000 a year — a level it is claimed can be achieved in just five years.

BOSS WORTH £400M

FOREVER Living's founder Rex Maughan, 79, has an estimated net worth of more than £400million. He was brought up on a ranch in Idaho and is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

His religion — Mormonism — opposes

Can you really earn £350,000 a year selling aloe vera?

As thousands of women join a controversial home-selling empire, read Candice's very cautionary tale



Picture: JOHN LAWRENCE

abortion and homosexuality, and Maughan is believed to have used his wealth to help oppose same-sex marriage in the U.S. He founded Forever Living Products in 1978.

Maughan — a father of three with 12 grandchildren — was accused of sacking two staff in 1996 after they refused to sell him land, though in 2002 he was cleared of wrongdoing.

Maughan — who offered financial backing to Republican candidate Mitt Romney's bids for the presidency in 2008 and 2012 — was listed in the Forbes 400 in 2002 as the world's 368th richest man.

GEL DRINKS & SOAP

FOREVER Living products range from bath salts and shower gels to essential oils, soap and gel drinks.

The core ingredient — aloe vera — is said to contain anti-inflammatory properties and, when swallowed, there is evidence it can help lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels and aid digestion.

Despite being forbidden from making claims that Forever Living products can treat illnesses, some unscrupulous FBOs do just that.

Lucy Blackburn, 38, suffers from Crohn's disease — an inflammatory bowel disorder that causes abdominal pain and fever — and was swayed by claims a £21.62 aloe gel supplement could make her condition more manageable.

'The sales rep told me it would help ease my digestive symptoms and bowel movements,' says Lucy, from Bridlington, Yorks.

Despite knowing she was reliant on disability benefits, the rep was persistent. 'I was so desperate I was prepared to try anything,' says Lucy.

'I persevered with the gel for six weeks, but it tasted foul, made me feel sick and didn't stop stomach cramps. I felt conned.'

THE CONTROVERSY

MANY people believe some multi-level marketing companies — including Forever Living — are similar to pyramid schemes. These

are illegal businesses that recruit members by promising rewards for enrolling others, rather than through the selling products.

Marketing strategist Lyanna Tsakiris explains: 'With pyramid schemes, individuals pay a fee to enter, and once they recruit others they get paid. This money is not invested in any product, but passed up the chain of investors.'

IS IT LEGAL?

YES, it is. A spokesperson told the Mail it is 'absolutely not' a pyramid scheme and stressed less than 20 per cent of revenue last year came from recruitment, with 900,000 product orders placed in 2015.

Nonetheless, Lynne Tsakiris says: 'It is a fine line. Multi-level marketing and pyramid schemes depend on continuous recruitment.'

'Forever Living can just about be classed as multi-level marketing because the products are "legitimate" — though many don't see them as having health benefits — while a pyramid scheme offers a non-existent or worthless product.'

UNDER PRESSURE

AS SOON as Candice forked out £200 and signed an online form to become an assistant supervisor, the pressure from her 'upline' — the women higher up in her chain of command — began.

'Suddenly the secrecy surrounding the company lifted. Everyone piled in and I felt the onus was more to recruit than sell,' she says.

Candice was introduced, with a photo and biography, via a Forever Living Facebook group to hundreds of other sellers and, within hours, the four women in her upline were sending Facebook messages advising on sales strategy.

'One told me to put together a list of 100 family and friends who might want to join Forever Living and details of how I planned to contact them. One even started contacting them directly.'

'I was told to join four Forever



Hard sell: Some of the Forever Living aloe vera beauty products sold by Candice Kiddle (top) while working from home

Living Facebook groups that would help me sell, including a boot camp group that would kick me out if I didn't get enough people to join.

'They messaged several times a day asking me what I'd sold. It was overwhelming.'

When approached by the Mail, a Forever Living spokesman denied pressure was put on FBOs, saying: 'The company would never encourage this. Many people join Forever as a route to escape the pressures of traditional working environments.'

'The philosophy is such that it would never pressure people to buy products or join the business.'

SALES SPIEL

'I WAS told to write Facebook posts advertising Forever Living between 10am and 2pm because that's when working mothers would see them and envy my lifestyle,' says Candice. 'I was

instructed not to say anything negative and to use inspirational hashtags such as #thankgodforforever and #workingfromhome.'

Forever Living uses an internal virtual currency of what are called CCs — or case credits. Each CC is worth £165 and agents are expected to sell four CCs of products a month — £660 — to stay 'active' and receive their bonus.

Recruiting a new FBO is equivalent to selling 2CCs worth of products. Candice was delighted to notch up 26CCs — or £4,290 of sales — in her first month.

'Around 30 per cent of that money was my commission, but the company said I needed to expand my range so I spent the money on more products straight away.'

After three months, she was promoted to assistant manager, recruiting nine FBOs. But she says: 'When I should have been playing with the children I was glued to my

phone. I felt awful for duping people I recruited into believing I had a perfect lifestyle with my inspirational hashtags, when in reality I was working until 2.30am.'

LOST FRIENDSHIPS

BECAUSE FBOs use their social networks to sell and recruit, the line between friendships and working relationships is blurred.

Ever more desperate for sales, Candice persuaded her parents, sister, brother and partner to sign up — paying for their £200 beauty boxes out of her own pocket.

'Sam thought I was mad, but could see it was important to me. I wanted to prove wrong everyone who said it was rubbish.'

'But I still felt betrayed by the friend who had recruited me on the premise I would have more time to spend with my family.'

COUNTING THE COST

CANDICE quit in December and has returned to her job running a beauty salon. Despite earning thousands for the company, she says: 'I just broke even and by the end was exhausted and miserable.'

She now blocks those who post promotional messages about Forever Living on Facebook.

'Their exaggerated claims make me shudder,' says Candice, who says the friends she recruited have also left and, thankfully, harbour no grudge for her role in their recruitment.

'I realised this isn't a dream job that allowed me to spend more time with my children. It is all an elaborate illusion.'