

Understanding Contrast – Why Some Things Are Harder to See

Seeing clearly is about more than reading letters on an eye chart.

Many people are told that their eyesight has changed very little, yet everyday tasks are still difficult.

One reason is **contrast** – the ability to tell an object apart from its background.

Even when vision seems reasonably sharp, poor contrast can make faces, steps, kerbs, printed text and everyday objects much harder to see.

Understanding contrast can help explain why some daily tasks become more challenging and what practical steps can make life easier.

GOOD CONTRAST



- ✓ Faces are clearer
- ✓ Print is easier to read
- ✓ Steps and edges are easier to see
- ✓ More confident in everyday activities

REDUCED CONTRAST



- ✗ Faces harder to recognise
- ✗ Print looks faint or blurry
- ✗ Steps and edges are harder to see
- ✗ Less confident, may avoid activities

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05/08/2026



Working together for a more inclusive community for people with sight loss.



What Is Contrast?

Contrast is the difference between light and dark.

It helps you see objects clearly against their background.

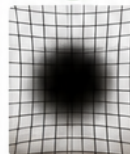
When contrast is reduced, things can look hazy, flat or washed out – even if your eyesight seems fairly good.



Common Causes

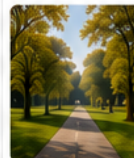
Many eye conditions can affect contrast.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)



Affects central vision and detail.

Glaucoma



Affects side vision and contrast.

Diabetic retinopathy



Can reduce clarity and contrast.

Cataract



Clouds the lens and reduces contrast.

Other causes



Including some inherited eye conditions and normal ageing.



Everyday Examples

Reduced contrast sensitivity can make many everyday situations more difficult.



Recognising faces, especially in dim light



Seeing food on a plate or cup on the table



Seeing steps, kerbs and uneven surfaces



Driving in rain, fog or at dusk



Reading pale print or handwriting



Watching TV or finding objects that blend in



Practical Ways to Help

Simple changes can make a big difference.



Improve lighting – good light, especially for reading, hobbies and small tasks.



Reduce glare – avoid bright reflections from windows and shiny surfaces.



Use contrasting colours – for steps, edges, plates, cups and light switches.



Increase text size and contrast – on phones, tablets, computers and printed material.



Use aids if helpful – magnifiers, reading lamps and low vision devices can support daily life.



Living Well with Reduced Contrast

Many people adapt by using better lighting, moving closer or taking a little more time. These are smart strategies, not signs of worsening eyesight.

Low vision specialists can help you find the right solutions to make everyday life easier and safer.



Key Message

Good vision is not measured by the eye chart alone. Contrast sensitivity plays a vital role in recognising faces, reading comfortably, avoiding falls and moving around safely.

Understanding this can help you make the most of your remaining vision.



Coming Next in the Series
Part 8: Understanding Peripheral Vision – Why Bumping into Things Happens



If you have concerns about your vision, please speak to your eye care professional. Croydon Vision – here to support you.



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