High versus Low Contrast Vision

When we test vision in the practice we are testing HIGH contrast vision - Black on White with sharp edges. That is easy and doesn't always tell us a lot as to how you function in the real world.

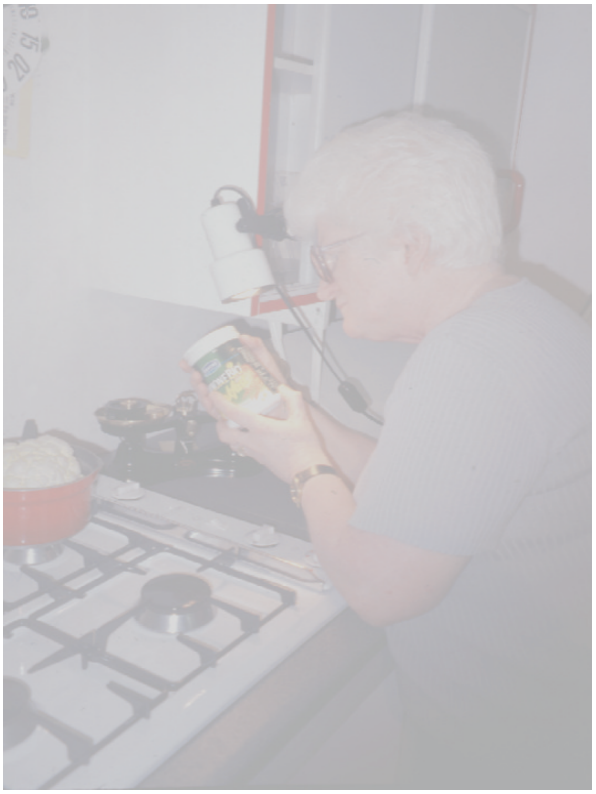
In the real world we have to adapt to a much broader range of visual conditions - poor light, fog and so on.

Low Contrast Chart - the letters get fainter not smaller

A lot of eye conditions may affect low contrast vision much more profoundly than high contrast. Someone may see the black and white letters of a standard test chart quite well but still struggle with day to day activities in a way many of us will not understand. We use Low Contrast charts to assess this aspect of vision.

The photos in this leaflet tries to show how improving contrast can aid mobility and safety.

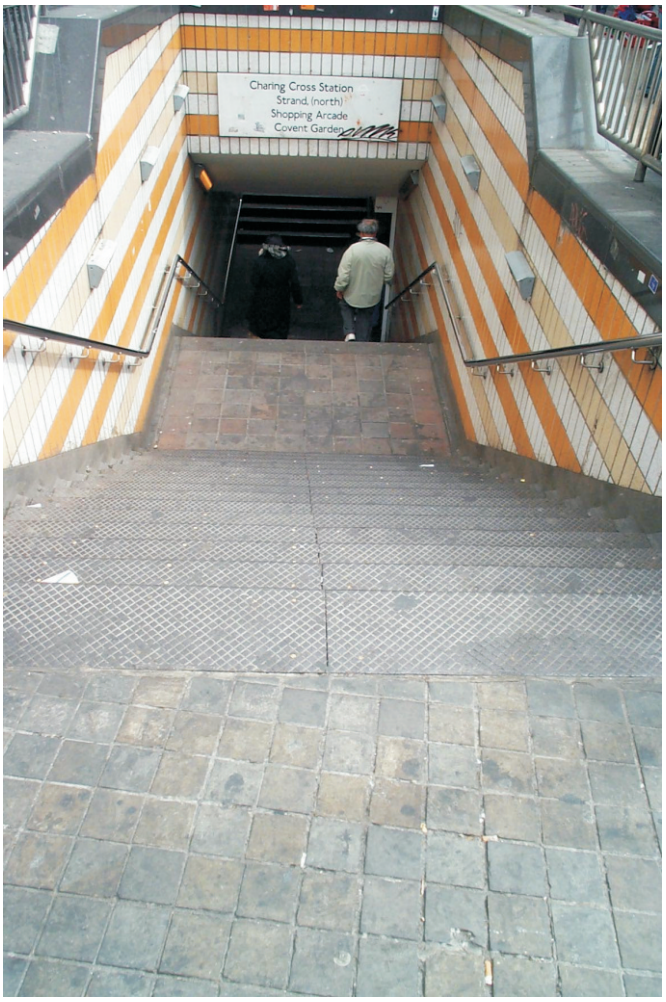
Improving contrast around the home can help.



The photos above show the black hob and bright pans contrasting against the white cooker, while the red around the cupboard helps prevent hitting your head. The directed light also helps.

Higher contrast implements can help enormously. Bright coloured cups, plates, cutlery or a black kettle will be much more visible against a white bench. At the very least it may prevent spilling something, but it could also stop hot fluids scalding.

Other safety items could include a black light switch on a white wall or high contrast cooker dials.



Going down stairs in particular can be a nightmare as the edges become lost. Bright strips along the stair edges make them more visible. In these photos the stairs themselves are poorly contrasted. Fortunately the hand rails are high contrast against the lighter coloured tiles. Always hang on to the rail.

Other low contrast dangers are concrete curbs and flagstones.

Disability Glare & Contrast.

Discomfort Glare

This is the sort of glare we all experience on a bright sunny day when the sun is high in the sky.
Sunglasses will easily relieve the problem.

Disability Glare

This is far more of a problem.
Vision is reduced by reducing contrast.
An example of 'Disability Glare' would be looking through a dirty or misted windscreen. It is as if we are viewing through a veil, the whole scene looks grey and washed out. Sunglasses will not help this sort of glare.

The only solution is to eliminate the source of the glare, clean the windshield or put the sun visor down.

Sources of disability glare could be:
Sun low in the sky in winter
Headlights or other lights directed at you.
Reflections from glossy pages
Sun streaming in a window