



Eye Essentials

Flashes, Floaters & PVD (posterior vitreous detachment)

What are spots or floaters?

These are dark specks, strands, spots, dots or cobwebs moving in your field of vision. People with floaters will notice that they are more apparent when looking at a plain background or sky. Although floaters seem to be in front of the eye, they are in fact opacities floating inside the eye. Floaters are not imaginary and can be viewed by your ophthalmologist using special equipment

What causes floaters?

The eye contains a jelly like substance, known as vitreous, which fills the central cavity of the eye. As we grow older the vitreous can shrink, thicken, or become more fluid, forming clumps or strands inside the eye. Floaters often occur when the vitreous gel pulls away from the retina, condition known as posterior vitreous detachment (PVD).

Besides PVD and ageing, floaters can also be associated with certain eye diseases (like blood in the vitreous gel- vitreous hemorrhage) and with other conditions such as migraine.

What are flashes?

Flashes are seeing lights going on and off, especially on one side of the field of the vision, even when the eyes are closed.

What causes flashes?

When the vitreous gel inside the eye pulls on the retina, it may cause you to see flashing of lights. This usually happens during PVD

If you see jagged lines of light that last 10 to 20 minutes and happen in one or both eyes, this is probably a migraine caused by the spasm of blood vessels in the brain.

Do floaters and flashes cause any harm?

Floaters and flashes themselves are harmless; the changes that are occurring in the eye can potentially be causing damage, which if untreated may lead to loss of vision.

Most of the times the vitreous separates from the retina (PVD) without causing any symptoms. In some cases the retina can tear if the shrinking vitreous gel pulls away from the wall of the eye. A torn retina is always a serious problem, since it can lead to a retinal detachment.

Sometimes, there is a sudden occurrence of flashing lights with many new floaters or even with a blacking out of part of the field of vision. If this happens, you should see your ophthalmologist right away to find out if you have a retinal tear or retinal detachment.

Approximately 15% of patients with acute symptoms of PVD have a retinal tear at the time of the initial examination. Patients with acute PVD who have no retinal breaks on presentation have a 2% to 5% chance of developing them in the weeks that follow. In patients who present with substantial vitreous hemorrhage following, the chances of having retinal tears increases to about 70%.

What is the treatment of Floaters and flashes?

The treatment for floaters and flashes depends upon the underlying condition. Most of the flashes and floaters are not serious but you should always have an eye examination by an ophthalmologist to make sure there has been no damage to your retina.

Although some floaters may remain in your vision, but most of them usually fade over the time and gradually become less bothersome.



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However if the floaters become bothersome and you think you are not able to cope with your day to day life because of the annoying floaters, then floater correction surgery can be considered. The surgery involves removal of the jelly from the eye (Vitrectomy).

If retinal tears are found on examination then laser/cryotherapy or surgery are the options.