

## **Flashes and Floaters**

Floaters refer to tiny strands, spots or shapes that you may see in your field of vision.

Flashes are streaks of light or lines that may appear in your field of vision. If you've ever seen flashes of light when you rubbed your eyes or 'stars' when you've bumped your head, then you've seen a flash.

Flashes and floaters are very common, and both are harmless in the vast majority of cases. However, if you experience a new onset in floaters, or flashes whether or not accompanied by a loss of peripheral vision, please contact us immediately for an appointment. These symptoms could indicate that you have a detached retina, a very serious condition that can lead to vision impairment and permanent vision loss.

### **Symptoms**

Symptoms of harmless flashes and floaters that most everyone has experienced include...

- ◆ Dark spots that float in your vision and move as you move your eyes
- ◆ Dark spots that remain in place when you move your eyes
- ◆ Clusters of dark areas that look like spider webs floating in your vision
- ◆ Flickering or flashing lights that show up when you look at a bright area such as the sky

If you experience the following symptoms, call us immediately for an appointment. They may indicate a more serious vision problem that should be treated...

- ◆ New flashes and/or floaters whether or not accompanied by a sudden decrease of vision
- ◆ Obstructed partial vision, as if a curtain had been drawn
- ◆ Sudden increase in flashes or floaters

### **Causes**

Both flashes and floaters happen in the space between your eye lens and the retina. This space is filled with a clear, gel-like fluid called the vitreous that is attached to your retina. As you age, the vitreous thins and may separate from the back of your eye. As this happens, you may see minor flashes and floaters. Floaters occur as tiny bits of the vitreous fluid or cells cast shadows on your retina. Flashes happen when the vitreous tugs on the retinal tissue. Usually, the separation of the vitreous and the accompanying flashes and floaters are natural, common, harmless conditions.



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However, floaters and flashes can also be caused by more serious conditions, such as retinal tears, retinal detachment, blood vessel spasms, infections, inflammation, hemorrhages, eye injury or an injury such as a blow to the head. Migraine headaches may also be accompanied by flashes, which are usually seen in both eyes and happen before the migraine starts. Nearsighted people are more prone to floaters.

## **Treatment**

To determine the cause of your flashes and floaters, we will dilate your pupils and examine your eyes, especially the vitreous and retina, using an ophthalmoscope.

Most flashes and floaters are harmless and don't require treatment. Even an annoying floater will usually settle below the line of sight after a few weeks or months and become less bothersome and noticeable.

However, depending on the cause of your flashes and floaters, and on whether your vision is significantly affected, treatment may be required. If the flashes and floaters are related to a problem other than separation of the vitreous (called Posterior Vitreous Detachment, or PVD), laser or surgical treatment may be required depending on the underlying cause, such as retinal tear or detachment.

It's very important that you monitor your vision and report any new symptoms or changes in your vision to us. Quick diagnosis and treatment of visual problems may mean the difference between having excellent vision and suffering visual impairment.