

Vitreous Floaters

What is a vitreous floaters?

A vitreous floater looks like a small speck, dot, circle, line or cobweb in your field of vision. Floaters are tiny clumps of gel or cells inside the vitreous that fill your eye and what you see are the shadows these clumps cast on your retina. You often notice floaters when looking at a white wall or a blue sky.

Who can get vitreous floaters?

You are more likely to get vitreous floaters if you are nearsighted (need glasses to see far away), have had cataract surgery or have had inflammation or swelling inside the eye.

What can be done about the irritating floaters?

While they can be a nuisance, no eye drops or medications can dissolve floaters. Surgery is usually not indicated. With gravity, the floaters tend to sink down, out of the line of sight. Usually they become less noticeable with time. This process usually takes weeks or sometimes months to improve.

Vitreous Detachment

What is a vitreous detachment?

The vitreous is a jelly-like substance between the lens and the retina that makes up most of the volume of the eye. Usually the vitreous gel is loosely attached to the surface of the retina. However, the vitreous can detach or separate from the retina by condensing or collapsing. This separation of the vitreous is a normal event that will happen to most people.

What are the symptoms of a vitreous detachment?

Sometimes this happens slowly and it is hardly noticed. Often there are flashes of light and the appearance of the floaters in the vision. Whenever the retina is stimulated, it records this as light falling on the retina – hence the flashes. The floaters represent condensations of protein that once were near the surface of the retina. With the collapse of the vitreous gel, clumps of this protein are suspended in front of the retina, causing a shadow to be cast on the light sensitive retina by light entering the eye.

Is it dangerous? Is it related to retinal detachment?

Vitreous detachment in itself is not a threat to vision. Sometimes, however, if the vitreous is more strongly attached to the retina in one or more locations, the retina can be torn when the vitreous gel collapses. If a retinal tear occurs, fluid from the vitreous cavity can move through the tear, separating the retina from the other layers of the eye and causing a retinal detachment, a dangerous condition requiring surgery.

How do I know if I have a vitreous or a retinal detachment?

Flashes of light and floaters are sign of a retinal detachment. A sensation that a dark curtain or window shade is being pulled across the eye is another sign. If a dark area in the vision is noticed or the appearance of new flashes or floaters is noticed, a prompt retinal exam is important.

Beverly Hills Eye Associates
450 North Bedford Drive, Suite 101
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Phone (310) 274 - 9205
Fax (310) 274 - 7229
Web www.bheyes.com

Symptoms of a Retinal Detachment and Tear

The retina is the critical inside lining to the back of the eye that senses light and sends images to the brain. Occasionally, people develop a tear in the retina or the retina actually becomes detached from the inside of the eye. If this happens, it's not an immediate emergency to call 911 or to panic about. It is important to be seen within the first 24 – 48 hours if you have any significant symptoms of a retinal detachment or tear.

It is important to be aware of the following symptoms:

Flashing lights – These are usually described as small flashes of light located in one eye only. The flashes of light usually persist in one location. They are different from an ophthalmic migraine. When people have the acute onset of flashing lights, often multicolored lights, they can last for 15 – 45 minutes at a time then go away completely.

Floater – Most people have a few floaters in their vision now and then. The types of floaters that usually indicate a problem with the retina occur with a sudden appearance of many floaters (usually tens or hundreds). These are small dots in either eye.

Curtain – This is the most serious of retinal symptoms and will show a partial curtain or shadow that may block the vision in one eye.

If you have any of these classic symptoms, you may have a retinal problem; you should be evaluated within 24 – 48 hours. **These symptoms will rarely be subtle**, but any symptoms of flashes of light, change in floaters or a curtain effect that does not match the above symptoms, should be discussed with your ophthalmologist as soon as possible.