

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.