

What do floaters and flashes in my vision mean?

Ophthalmology

Information for Patients

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What are floaters?

Floaters look like spots, lines, circles, clouds, cobwebs and various other shapes in your vision. They seem black or grey and may often be see-through. Floaters usually move around or float in front of your vision.

What are flashes?

Flashes look like sparks or strands of white light that dart across your vision.

Why do they show up in my vision?

1 of the main causes of floaters and flashes is posterior vitreous detachment (PVD). PVD happens when the jelly-like substance filling the eyeball (vitreous) becomes separated from the light sensitive layer at the back of the eye (retina).

- Floaters are seen when clumps of vitreous make shadows on the retina. They are more obvious when looking against something white, or against a bright light.
- When the vitreous bumps, rubs or tugs against the retina, it causes flashes. This stimulates the nerves causing brief flashes.

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If I have PVD what does this mean?

Over 75% of those aged over 65 will have PVD. It is not a sign of disease as most PVD happens naturally as you get older. No treatment is needed for PVD.

A few patients with PVD may also have a tear or hole in the retina. An in-depth exam will look for this, and laser treatment may be needed to stop a retinal detachment (see below)

What else can cause floaters and flashes?

- **Migraine:** coloured flashes, enlarging zig-zag lines or kaleidoscope images commonly affecting both eyes, usually means a migraine. Some people often have the visual symptoms of a migraine but no headache.
- **Retinal detachment:** this happens when the retina separates from the back of the eye. Most often it happens because of a tear or a hole in the retina, which allows fluid to leak between the retinal layers, causing the retina to split. Usually surgery is needed to repair the split and keep your eyesight. Common signs of retinal split are:
 - the growth of a veil like blockage to your side vision (peripheral vision).
 - your vision suddenly getting worse.
 - a sudden increase in the floaters and/ or flashing lights in your vision.

What to do next

If you are worried about your vision and need more advice, please visit your own optician or Eye Casualty at Leicester Royal Infirmary for an assessment.

Contact number: 0116 258 6273.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
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