

FLOATERS & FLASHES

What Are Floaters?

You may sometimes see small specks or clouds moving in your field of vision. You may see them when looking at a plain background, like a blank wall or blue sky. Floaters are actually tiny clumps of gel or cells in the vitreous, the clear jelly-like fluid that fills the inside of your eye.

While these objects look as though they are in front of your eye, they are actually floating inside. What you see are the shadows they cast on the retina, the nerve layer at the back of the eye that senses light and allows you to see.

Floaters can have different shapes: little dots, circles, lines, clouds or cobwebs.

What Causes Floaters?

When people reach middle age, the vitreous gel often shrinks, forming clumps or strands. It may pull away from the back wall of the eye. This is a common cause of floaters.

Are Floaters Serious?

The retina can tear as the vitreous gel shrinks. This sometimes causes bleeding in the eye that may appear as a new floater. A torn retina is always a serious problem, since it can lead to a retinal detachment. You should see your ophthalmologist if a new floater appears suddenly or you see sudden flashes of light. Other symptoms, such as loss of side vision, may mean the retina has partly detached.

What Can Be Done About Floaters?

Floaters can get in the way of clear vision, which may be annoying, especially if you are trying to read.

You can try moving your eye, looking up and down to move the floater out of the way. While some floaters may remain in your vision, many of them will fade over time.

What Causes Flashing Lights?

When the vitreous gel rubs or pulls on the retina, you may see what looks like flashing lights or lightning streaks. The flashes of light can appear for several days, weeks or months. If you notice the sudden appearance of light flashes, you should visit your ophthalmologist immediately to see if the retina has been torn. If a retinal tear is found it can usually be treated immediately, and this prevents detachment of the retina.

How Are Your Eyes Examined?

During the examination your pupils will be dilated so we can view your retina. You should make arrangements for someone to drive you home.