



FLASHES & FLOATERS

While almost everyone sees a few spots or "floaters" at one time or another, they can occur more frequently and become more noticeable as you grow older. If you notice a sudden change in the number or size of spots, you should contact your optometrist right away so you can be sure they are not the result of a more serious problem.

SYMPTOMS

Floaters are small, semi-transparent or cloudy specks or particles within the eye that become noticeable when they fall within the line of sight. They may also appear with flashes of light.

The inner part of your eye is made up of a clear, jelly-like fluid known as the vitreous. As time passes the jelly-like fluid gradually becomes more liquid in nature and cells and structural fibres detach and float around in this jelly, resulting in the floaters that we commonly observe. When flashes of light occur causing spots to become noticeable, it can be a result of the jelly-like vitreous shrinking and pulling on the retina. This tugging action stimulates the retinal receptor cells to "fire," causing the perception of light flashes.

DIAGNOSIS

In a comprehensive eye examination, your eyes will be evaluated with special instruments that allow an examination of the health of the inside of your eyes and possible observation of the floaters.

This is often done after special drops are put in your eyes to make the pupils larger (called dilation) to allow a larger view of the inside of your eyes. These procedures provide the relevant information to detect spots.

Most floaters are normal and rarely cause blindness, but they may indicate more serious problems. If you notice a change in the number and size of floaters, a comprehensive eye examination is in order to determine the cause.

On rare occasions, vitreous detachment can cause small tears or holes in the retina. The damaged part of the retina subsequently does not work properly and a blind or blurred spot in vision results. If untreated, retinal tears or holes can continue to worsen and severe vision loss can result if the retina becomes detached.

TREATMENT

While flashes and floaters are normally not serious or treatable, they can be symptoms or signs of either vitreous or retinal detachment. In either of these cases, treatment with lasers and/or surgical intervention may be necessary to preserve your vision. If you notice a sudden increase or change in the number and type of flashes and floaters, contact your optometrist immediately.

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