

## Flashes and Floaters

### *What are floaters?*

Dark or semi-transparent spots or hair like filaments that appear to float in front of your vision. As the light passes through your eye any debris or pigment in the jelly (vitreous humour) casts a shadow on the light sensitive tissue (the retina) and this makes it visible to us. Floaters are common and are most likely a result of the jelly moving. Very occasionally floaters can indicate a problem at the back of the eye.

Floaters can be visible for a long time and may never fully disappear. Floaters can get smaller with time; they can sink out of view as well. Most people normally get used to their floaters and notice them less as their eyes and brain learn to ignore them.

### *What are flashes?*

An unexplained bright lightning bolt or camera flash could be described as a flash. These tend to be in the corners of your vision and may be

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due to the jelly in your eye (vitreous humour) moving or tugging at the light sensitive tissue (the retina). These are different from the shimmering kaleidoscope or 'zig-zag' effect during a migraine.

*What should I do if I have any of these?*

If you experience obvious new floaters, sudden flashes of light, a curtain or veil coming across your vision you should contact your optometrist urgently. If you cannot reach your optometrist then you should seek urgent medical advice.

*What can cause these flashes and floaters?*

The most likely cause of these symptoms is the jelly (vitreous) moving inside the eye. This may also lead to a posterior vitreous detachment (PVD) when the jelly pulls away from the back of the eye. This does not tend to affect the quality of your vision or require further treatment.

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However, flashes and/or floaters can be a symptom of a retinal detachment or tear (the retina is the light sensitive part of the eye). This is something that can be treated but needs immediate attention. Therefore, if you have any of these symptoms you should contact your optometrist straight away. There is a higher risk associated with these symptoms if you have:

- Trauma to the head or eye associated with the onset of your symptoms
- Had eye surgery e.g. cataracts
- Moderate short sightedness (Myopia), over -3.00DS
- Previous retinal detachment
- Been advised previously that you are at a higher risk of retinal detachment