

“Floaters and Flashes of Light”

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Floaters and Flashes of Light are frequent visual disturbances for which people may be referred to the Ophthalmologist.

These visual disturbances represent signs of natural changes in the clear jelly (Vitreous) which fills the eye cavity and are often seen by people with healthy eyes.

What causes Floaters?

Floaters are shadows on the retina cast by particles in the jelly inside the eye, this jelly is called Vitreous.

The Vitreous starts to become less solid and more mobile as we get older.

The Floaters can look like different shapes, such as:-

- A hair
- A fly or insect
- Spots
- Circles
- Threads

Typically these floaters move with eye movements and drift away when you try to focus on them. They are more noticeable against a plain background or on a sunny day.

What causes Flashes of light?

With age the jelly/vitreous begins to shrink and to separate from the inside lining of the eye, people may see this as ‘flashes of light’.

These flashes of light are more noticeable in the edge of your vision and are usually triggered by eye movements and are more obvious in dim light.

Over time, your brain will become less aware of floaters and the flashing of light will stop when the vitreous has completely finished separating from the inside lining of the eye.

This doesn’t necessarily mean that the retina is damaged.

Separation of the vitreous from the retina is called posterior vitreous detachment or PVD.

Vitreous separation is a once in lifetime event that can last up to several weeks from the initial onset. It often happens in the other eye soon after.

How can PVD it be treated? Who treats retinal detachments?

No treatment is required for a PVD

Vitreous separations are generally unremarkable however some may affect the retina causing a tiny tear.

What is a retinal tear?

A tear in the retina can be caused if there are weak areas in the retina or as the vitreous has separates from the retina.

How can a retinal tear be treated?

A tear in the retina can be treated by laser in the Outpatient Department to "spot weld" and seal the tear.

After the treatment it takes approximately 10 days to scar and seal the tear.

You still need to be vigilant for the symptoms detailed in the section below.

What is a retinal detachment?

A **retinal detachment** is where the inside lining of the eye, the retina, peels away.

If this occurs you may see a dark shadow appearing in the vision over hours or days.

A retinal detachment is determined by having a peripheral retinal examination by a specialist.

Specialist Ophthalmologists, trained in retinal surgery treat retinal detachments.

The urgency to treat a retinal detachment is determined by the position of the retina and confirmed by the specialist retinal Ophthalmologist.

The following symptoms can be indicators of retinal detachment:

- A black shadow or curtain in your vision
- Worsening of floaters after flashes of light has ceased
- Increased blurring of vision

People who are diabetic, short sighted (myopic), or who have had recent eye surgery or trauma are more susceptible to retinal problems.

If you experience any new symptoms such as a sudden burst of new floaters, new flashes, a veil or shadow crossing the vision from any direction, or new blurred vision, call **111** immediately to be triaged to the appropriate service. We are an acute referral centre which means that during office hours you will usually be booked an appointment slot to come in rather than attending the emergency department.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by Royal Devon staff undertaking procedures at the Royal Devon hospitals.

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