

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF FLASHES AND FLOATERS

Our staff will dilate your pupils with eye drops so that one of our doctors can examine your retina with various instruments and techniques. There is no viable treatment for flashes or floaters themselves, but there is treatment for the serious eye disorders such as retinal tears or retinal detachments that may be the cause of the flashes or floaters.

A retinal tear can usually be treated with a laser or cryotherapy (freezing) that “tacks” the tear back in place. The procedure takes only a few minutes to perform and is usually painless.

It is critical that a new retinal tear be repaired as soon as possible. Untreated, it could lead to a total loss of vision. The treatment for a retinal detachment can be the same as a retinal tear or may require very serious retinal surgery requiring hospitalization, and the results are less certain. After your diagnosis, we will determine the best treatment plan for you.



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FLASHES, FLOATERS & VITREOUS DETACHMENT

Almost everyone has experienced spots floating in his or her vision. Sometimes one can make them disappear by merely turning the head, moving the eyes or blinking. When the spots appear rather fuzzy and seem to be strung together with a web-like thread, they are called floaters.

lit-  Flashes are bright points of light that usually flash into view. They usually appear as tiny dashes forming an arc, line or other circular shape, and often come and go in an instant. Both flashes and floaters can be harmless symptoms of maturing eyes, or they can be indicators of a serious eye disorder, such as a torn retina, or a retinal detachment.

WHAT CAUSES SPOTS & FLOATERS?

The center of the eye is filled with a clear jelly-like fluid known as vitreous humor. This fluid has a microfibrillar matrix of protein fibers that give it the consistency of egg-white. Often, small flecks of protein or other natural matter become trapped in the vitreous during the formation of the eye before birth. These particles remain in the vitreous throughout life and are occasionally seen as spots or floaters. Spots and floaters can also be caused by the weakening of protein fibers causing a collapse of the fibrillar matrix into clumps of protein. In other words, the jello (vitreous) shrinks and pulls forward from the back of the eye.

Although distracting and annoying, these naturally formed spots and floaters rarely cause loss of vision. Trauma or serious diseases such as diabetic retinopathy or macular degeneration may cause similar symptoms which can be indicators of a retinal tear or a retinal detachment resulting in partial or total loss of vision.

Once floaters occur, they will usually remain throughout a patient's lifespan. Sometimes they become less noticeable, but usually they are visible throughout life.

WHAT CAUSES FLASHES & VITREOUS DETACHMENT?

As one grows older, the vitreous humor that fills the center cavity of the eye begins to shrink. This causes the vitreous to pull away from the retina creating occasional bright bursts of light or flashes that are seen when the eyes are opened or closed.

These flashes typically cease in a matter of days or weeks when the vitreous has fully detached from the retina. However, some people will continue to see a very occasional flash, and this is usually not a vision-threatening condition.



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