# FLOATERS

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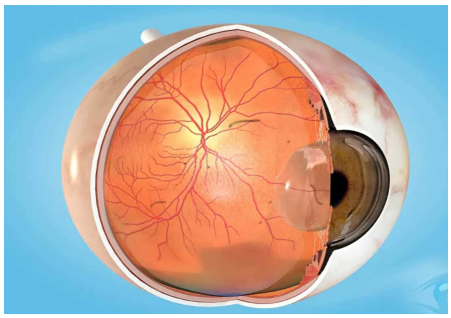
**Q What are floaters?**

A Floaters are tiny, dark, spots or strands that move across your vision. They tend to be particularly noticeable in bright light or when looking at a blue sky or light coloured wall. They are quite common and are more likely to develop as you get older.



Floaters are usually harmless and do not have a major effect on vision. Although they may be annoying at first, your brain slowly learns to ignore them to some extent.

**Q What causes floaters?**

A The back of the eye is filled with a jelly-like substance called the vitreous humour. Throughout life the vitreous tends to liquefy and shrink slightly and strands of a protein called collagen often accumulate in it. These strands swirl gently when the eye moves and cast a shadow onto the back of the eye.

Floaters are more likely to develop as we age and are more common in people who are very short-sighted, have diabetes, or who have had a cataract operation.

**Q Can there be complications?**

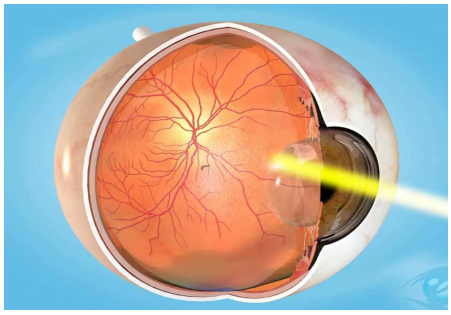
A As the vitreous shrinks it tends to pull slightly on the points where it is loosely attached to the retina, the eye's light-sensitive tissue. When this happens, flashes of light are sometimes seen out of the corner of your eye and in some cases, cells break off from the retina and enter the vitreous, causing a sudden increase in the number of floaters.

This is known as a Posterior Vitreous Detachment (PVD). This can happen at any age but is most common among people between the age of 40 and 60. A PVD on its own is not serious but in some cases the retina can tear as the vitreous breaks away and this can lead to a retinal detachment.

A retinal detachment occurs when any part of the retina, is lifted or pulled from its normal position at the back wall of the eye. A retinal detachment is a serious condition and should always be considered an emergency. If left untreated, it can lead to permanent visual impairment within two or three days or even blindness in the eye. Those who experience a sudden increase in floaters, flashes of light in peripheral vision, or a loss of peripheral vision should have an eye care professional examine their eyes as soon as possible.

**Q What can be done to help?**

A In most cases, vision is not significantly affected by floaters so no treatment is required. In extreme cases when the vitreous becomes full of floaters and vision is significantly impaired by them, the vitreous gel can be replaced with a silicone gel.



Newer treatments using lasers to “evaporate” the floaters are also beginning to emerge.