

What are Flashes and Floaters (Posterior Vitreous Detachment/PVD)?

The space behind the lens of the eye and the retina is filled with a clear, jelly-like substance called the vitreous. With age, the vitreous thins and may separate from the retina (posterior vitreous detachment/PVD). PVD is very common and usually harmless. As the vitreous is pulling away from the retina, some patients may notice flashes in their peripheral vision. Floaters are caused by tiny bits of vitreous gel or collagen strands (hairlike) that cast shadows on the retina.

More serious causes of flashes and floaters may be: retinal tears, retinal detachments, infections, inflammation, hemorrhage.

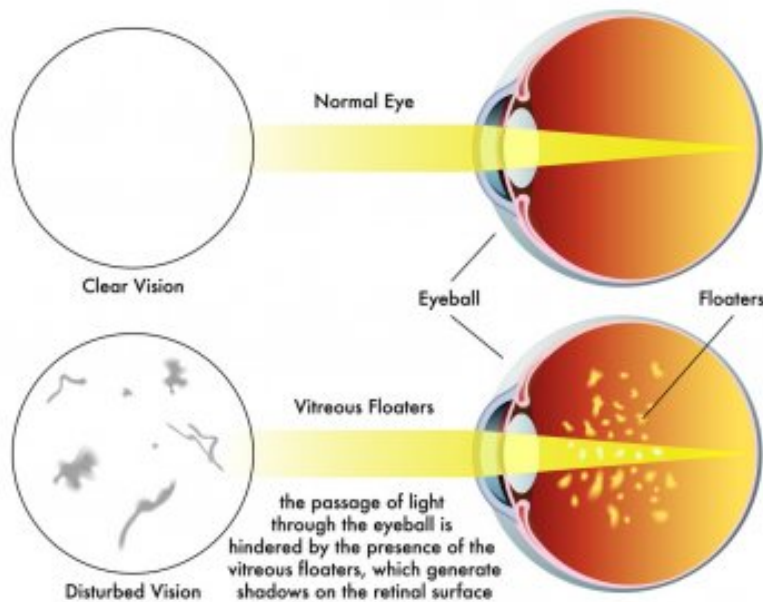


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Signs and Symptoms

- Black spots, "spider webs", or strands that seem to float in vision (alone or in a cluster)
- Spots that move or remain in one place
- Flickering or flashing of lights that are most prominent when looking at a bright background (clear, blue sky)
- Symptoms that may indicate a more serious problem:
 - Sudden decrease in vision along with flashes and floaters
 - Veil or curtain that obstructs part or all vision
 - Sudden increase in floaters

Treatment Options

Treatment is rarely needed since floaters typically become less bothersome over a period of weeks to months as they settle below the line of sight. Because of the risk, surgery is reserved for cases where vitreous floaters obscure the vision. Even in such cases the floaters may be observed for up to one year before further intervention. In these cases, surgical removal of the vitreous (vitrectomy) may be considered.

Under certain circumstances it may be indicated to use a gas bubble injected into the vitreous cavity at the time of surgery. This would require the patient to adhere to current post operative positioning for 1-2 weeks following surgery and would prohibit air travel for 4-10 weeks or until gas naturally dissipates.

This surgery is not considered emergent and can be scheduled at the patient's earliest convenience.

FAQ

When should I call the eye doctor?

If you experience sudden increase in floaters, sudden decrease in vision, or a veil/curtain that obstructs your vision, call us as soon as possible to have a dilated eye exam.

How can I test my vision at home?

- ✓ Cover 1 eye and pick something straight ahead to look at
- ✓ Note the quality of your central and peripheral vision, note any changes
- ✓ Look for obstructions, veils or curtains in your peripheral vision
- ✓ Watch for floaters and/or flashes
- ✓ Note the duration and intensity of the symptoms
- ✓ Cover the other eye and repeat
- ✓ Report any new symptoms or changes in vision to your eye doctor