

Floater

What are floaters?

The small specks or clouds that you may see moving in your field of vision are called floaters.

Floaters are actually tiny clumps of gel or cellular debris within the vitreous, (which is in your eye ball) the clear jelly-like fluid that fills the inside cavity of the eye.

Although these objects appear to be in front of the eye, they are actually floating in the fluid inside the eye and cast shadows on the retina (the light sensing inner layer of the eye)

What causes floaters?

During middle age the vitreous gel degenerates. As we get older the vitreous becomes more of a fluid and pulls away from the retina leaving a membrane free in the eye to form floaters. These move around freely in the now liquid vitreous.

It also occurs frequently in near sighted people or those who have undergone cataract surgery or laser surgery.

What are the symptoms?

Small floaters are common to us all and are especially visible when staring at a white ceiling or the sky. However, as the vitreous becomes more fluid like, after the age of 50 years, more prominent floaters can develop and are described as: spiders, dots, tadpoles, or a fly in the vision. These move around and wobble in the vision. Occasionally there is a flash of light or twinkle.

What can be done about floaters?

Floaters may interfere with clear vision, often when reading, and can be quite annoying. Although there is no treatment or cure for most floaters, they may slowly get less by themselves over time. You can take simple measures to temporarily move them from your sight by looking up, down, to the left and to the right.

If a floater appears directly in your line of vision, try moving your eye around, the fluid inside may swirl and allow the floater to move out of your way. We are accustomed to moving our eyes from side to side, but looking up and down will cause different currents within

the eye and may be more effective in getting the floaters out of the way.

If floaters significantly affect your vision a lot, an operation to replace the vitreous with a salt solution (saline) may be considered. This procedure is called a vitrectomy.

A vitrectomy removes the vitreous, along with its floating debris, from the eye. Vitrectomy is only carried out in rare cases, because there are risks associated with eye surgery, and floaters generally become less of a problem over time. Possible complications of this type of surgery include retinal detachment, (retina comes away from the inner eyeball) retinal tears, (weakening of the retina) and cataracts (a clouding of the lens of the eye). Most eye surgeons only recommend it if floaters seriously interfere with vision

Risks: Are floaters serious?

The vitreous covers the retinal surface. Occasionally, the retina is torn when degenerating vitreous pulls away. This causes a small amount of bleeding in the eye which may appear as a group of new floaters. A torn retina can be serious if it develops into a retinal detachment.

PLEASE CONSULT YOUR OPTICIAN OR DOCTOR IF YOU NOTICE ANY SUDDEN ONSET OF MANY FLOATERS OR FLAHERS OF LIGHT.

What causes flashing lights?

When the vitreous gel, which fills the inside of the eye, rubs or pulls on the retina, it sometimes produces the illusion of flashing lights or lightening streaks. You may have experienced this sensation if you have ever been hit in the eye and seen stars.

The flashes of light may appear off and on for several weeks or months. This commonly occurs as we grow older and is usually not a cause for worry. On rare occasions, however, light flashes may accompany a large number of new floaters and even partial loss or shadowing of side vision. When this happens, a prompt eye examination is important to find out if a torn retina or retinal detachment has occurred.

Flashes of light which appear as jagged lines or “heat waves” often lasting 10-20 minutes and present in both eyes are likely to be migraine caused by spasm of blood vessels in the brain. If a headache follows, it is called a migraine. However, these jagged lines or “heat waves” commonly occur without headaches. In this case, the

light flashes are referred to as ophthalmic migraine or migraine without headache.

**AS WITH FLOATERS, IF YOU EXPERIENCE THE
SUDDEN- ONSET OF MANY LIGHT FLASHES YOU
SHOULD BE SEEN BY YOUR OPTICIAN OR DOCTOR
PROMPTLY**

Who do I contact for further help and advice?

Please contact the hospital where you had your treatment

Boothroyd Day Care

Dewsbury Hospital 01924 816155

Pinderfields Day/Short Stay Unit 01924 541854

Pontefract Day Unit 01977 747547

Waiting List office (operations) 01924 542987 or
01924 543338

Eye Condition advice 01924 816027

Other useful information can be found at:

NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk

We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment, complaint or appreciation about the care you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on:01924 542972 or email: pals@midyorks.nhs.uk
To contact any of our hospitals call:0844 811 8110
To book or change an appointment call:844 822 0022

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