

Floaters and Flashes in Your Vision



Floaters and Flashes — Should I Worry?

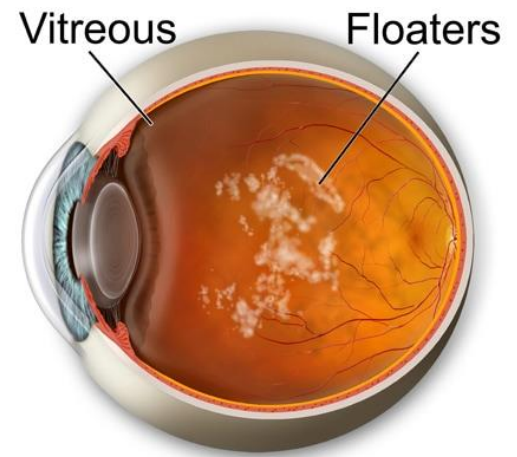
Have you ever noticed tiny spots, strings, or cobweb-like shapes drifting across your vision? Maybe they move when you move your eyes, or seem to dart away when you try to look directly at them. These are called **floaters, and they're very common** — especially as we get older. Sometimes, they appear along with brief flickers or flashes of light. While most floaters and flashes are harmless, in some cases they can be an early warning sign of a more serious eye problem.

Floaters can look like:

- Small dots or circles
- Wavy lines or strands
- Cobwebs or clouds
- Little “bugs” drifting across your view

They tend to move when you move your eyes and drift when you try to look directly at them.





What Are Floaters?

Inside your eye is a clear, jelly-like substance called the vitreous, which fills the space between the lens and the retina (the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye).

As you age, this gel naturally becomes thinner and begins to shrink. Small clumps or strands can form inside the vitreous and cast tiny shadows on the retina — these are what you see as floaters.

What Are Flashes?

Flashes of light happen when the shrinking vitreous tugs or pulls on the retina. You might see them as brief flickers, lightning streaks, or sparkles — especially in dim lighting or when you move your eyes suddenly. These flashes usually last only a second or two and often happen in one eye at a time.



Occasional flashes can occur as part of the normal aging process, but sudden or persistent flashes, especially with new floaters, should always be checked right away.

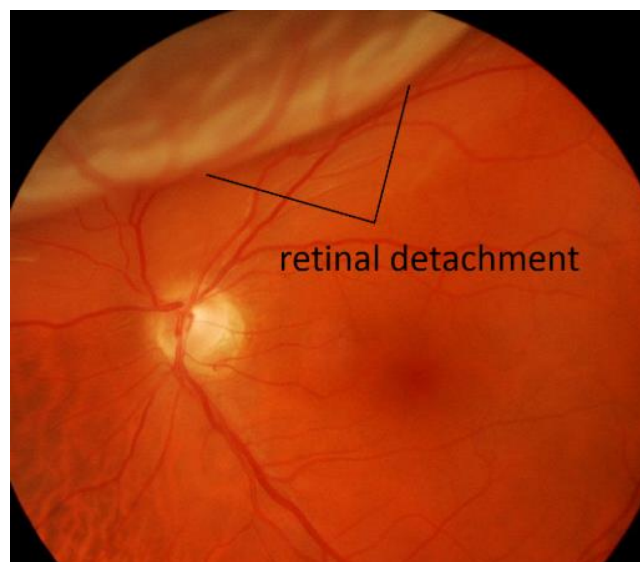
Should I Worry about Flashes?

While most floaters and flashes are harmless, they can sometimes be an early warning sign of a retinal tear or detachment, which is a medical emergency. The retina is a thin layer that lines the back of the eye and is essential for vision. If it tears or detaches, it can cause permanent vision loss if not treated quickly.

You should contact an optometrist or ophthalmologist immediately if you notice:

- **A sudden increase in the number or size of floaters (like a “shower” of black dots)**
- **New or persistent flashes of light**
- **A dark curtain, shadow, or gray area moving across your vision**
- **Blurred or distorted central vision**
- **Loss of peripheral (side) vision**

These symptoms may mean that the vitreous has pulled hard enough to tear the retina, allowing fluid to leak underneath it — causing it to lift away from the back of the eye. This requires urgent treatment, often with laser or surgery, to prevent permanent vision loss.



How Are Floaters and Flashes Checked?

Your eye doctor will perform a dilated eye examination to look closely at your retina and vitreous. They may use special lenses or imaging such as OCT (optical coherence tomography) or retinal photography to check for tears or detachment.



If everything looks healthy, they'll monitor you over time to ensure no new problems develop. Sometimes floaters may persist but become less noticeable as your brain adapts.

Can Floaters Be Treated?

Most floaters do not need treatment and often fade into the background. However, if they're very dense or interfere with daily activities, options include:

Laser vitreolysis: A special laser can sometimes break up large floaters, though the suitability of this treatment needs to be considered by an ophthalmologist .

Vitrectomy surgery: In rare cases, surgery to remove the vitreous can be considered, but it carries some risks and is usually reserved for severe cases.

Protecting Your Eye Health

You can't always prevent floaters or flashes, but you can protect your eyes by:

- Having regular eye exams, especially after age 50.
- Wearing eye protection during sports or activities to prevent trauma.
- Managing health conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, which can affect the retina.
- Seeking immediate care if you notice sudden changes in vision.



In Summary

Floaters and flashes are usually harmless signs of aging inside the eye, but sometimes they're a warning of something more serious. **The key is to know what's normal for you** — and to act quickly if things change.

If you ever notice new floaters, flashes, or a shadow in your vision, don't wait. Call your ophthalmology clinic right away. Early treatment could save your sight.