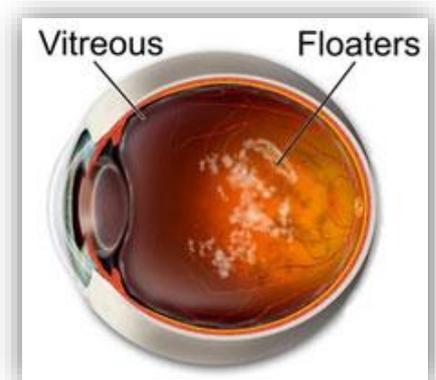


# Floaters & flashes

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## What are floaters and flashes?

- Floaters and flashes are a common sight for many people.
- Floater is a catch-all term for the specks, threads, or cobweb-like images that occasionally drift across the line of vision.
- Flashes are sparks or strands of light that flicker across the visual field.
- Both are usually harmless, but they can be a warning sign of trouble in the eye, especially when they suddenly appear or become more plentiful.
- A floater is a tiny cluster of cells or fleck of protein lodged in the vitreous humour.
- This clear, stable gel, which looks like raw egg white, supports and fills the rear two-thirds of the eyeball.
- The vitreous provides a pathway for light coming into the eye through the lens.
- The vitreous connects to the retina, the patch of light-sensitive cells along the back of the eye that captures images and sends them to the brain via the optic nerve.
- What you see isn't actually the floater itself, but the shadow it casts onto the retina.
- Floaters move as your eyes move.
- They appear to zoom away when you try to look directly at them, and drift slowly when your eyes stop moving.



- The vitreous slowly shrinks with age, causing it to become a bit stringy.

- The strands cast shadows on the retina, causing floaters.
- About 25% of people have some vitreous shrinkage with floaters by their 60s; that rises to about two-thirds of 80-year-olds.
- Floaters also appear more often in people who are nearsighted, those who have had cataract surgery or a previous eye injury, and those with diabetes.
- Although most people tolerate floaters just fine, others feel that floaters affect their vision and disrupt their ability to read.
- Flashes occur when the vitreous gel bumps, rubs, or tugs against the retina.
- Like floaters, flashes are generally harmless and require no treatment.



### How serious are floaters?

- The retina is prone to tearing if the shrinking vitreous gel pulls away from the wall of the eye.
- This sometimes results in a small amount of bleeding in the eye that may appear as new floaters.
- A torn retina is serious as it can lead to a retinal detachment.
- Therefore it is crucial you see your eye specialist as soon as possible following a sudden appearance of even one new floater or your seeing sudden flashes of light
- Floaters can also get in the way of clear vision especially if you are trying to read.
- Many floaters will fade over time and become less bothersome, and you may be used to them.
- Even if you have experienced floaters for years we need to see you immediately you notice new ones.