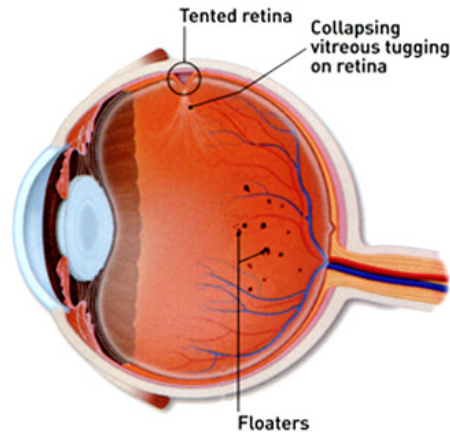


Flashes and Floaters

What are Floaters & Flashes?

Floaters are tiny clumps of gel or cells within the vitreous, the clear fluid that fills the inside of your eye. What you see are the shadows that they cast on the retina, the layer of cells lining the back of the eye that senses light and allows you to see.

Flashes occur when the vitreous gel rubs or pulls on the retina, causing you to see what looks like flashes of light or lightning streaks.



Although the floaters appear to be in front of the eye, they are actually floating in the vitreous fluid inside the eye.

Signs to Look For

Floaters appear as small specks, dots, circles, lines, clouds or cobwebs moving in your field of vision.

Flashes appear as flashing light or lightning streaks, which can occur on and off for several months.

Risk Factors

Floaters are commonly caused by the shrinking and thickening of the vitreous gel beginning in middle age. They are most common in people who are nearsighted, have undergone cataract operations, have had YAG laser surgery of the eye or have had inflammation inside the eye.

When the shrinking vitreous gel rubs or pulls on the retina, flashes can result. Flashes are also more common as we age.

Treatment Options

Most floaters are harmless and fade over time or become less bothersome. However, if even one new floater appears or you notice the sudden appearance of light flashes, see your ophthalmologist to see if treatment is necessary. One possible cause of both floaters and flashes is a torn retina. Without treatment, a torn retina can lead to retinal detachment, which requires surgery to repair.

If you get a headache following flashes that look like jagged lines or “heat waves” that last up to 20 minutes, this is called a migraine headache. If no headache follows, this is called an ophthalmic migraine and you should contact your ophthalmologist.



Robert W. Johnson, MD
231 SE Barrington Dr., Suite 208
Oak Harbor, WA 98277
(360)240-2020