



Floaters & flashes



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Floaters are specks, dots, cobwebs, or wavy lines that seem to fall within the line of sight. They rarely affect eyesight. They are more visible against a plain or dark background.
- Flashes are streaks of light that “flash” across the field of vision. They can occur when the eyes are closed or in extreme darkness.

TREATMENT

Self-care is enough to treat floaters and flashes in most cases. Sometimes, they are due to another medical condition.

CAUSES

With aging, the middle portion of the eye, called the vitreous, becomes less solid and more liquid. This allows particles (floaters), which have always been in the eye, to begin to move around. Flashes can occur when the vitreous shrinks and pulls on the retina of the eye. This is common. On rare occasions, when the vitreous detaches from the retina, it can rip or tear the retina. This may lead to a detached retina. The retina peels away from the eye wall causing sight loss.

Risk Factors

- Eye diseases or injuries
- A tear in the retina. Aging and cataract surgery increase the risk for this.
- High blood pressure. Diabetes. Migraine headaches.
- Nearsightedness

TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Do you have any of these signs of a detached retina?

- A floater appears suddenly.
- A large red floater disturbs vision.
- It looks like a curtain is over your field of vision.
- Number of floaters and/or light flashes keep increasing.

NO
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YES ► **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



With floaters or flashes, do you have any of these problems?

- A loss of side vision or central vision.
- Bleeding in the eye.
- The floaters don't move as you look at them.

NO
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YES ► **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



With floaters or flashes, do you have a history of migraine headaches or high blood pressure? Or, do the floaters or flashes last 10 to 20 minutes in both eyes?

NO
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YES ► **SEE DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- Move eyes up and down (not side to side) several times.
- Don't focus on or stare at plain, light backgrounds, such as a blank pastel wall or the light blue sky.
- You may notice flashes less if you avoid moving suddenly, don't bend over, and don't get up quickly from sitting or lying down.