



FLOATERS, FLASHES AND PVDs

What are flashes and floaters?

Floaters can be small specks, dots, circles, lines or cobwebs in your field of vision. Flashes can look like flashing lights or lightning streaks in your field of vision. Some describe it as being similar to “seeing stars” when you’ve been hit on the head.

How flashes and floaters affect vision

Light enters your eye and is detected by the **retina**, light-sensing nerve tissue at the back of your eye. The information it receives is transmitted through the **optic nerve** to the brain, where it is interpreted as the images you see.

Behind the lens is a clear, jelly-like substance called the **vitreous**, which helps the eye keep its shape during development. The vitreous and retina are normally in contact with each other. As we age, the vitreous starts to liquefy and shrink.

▶ FLOATERS

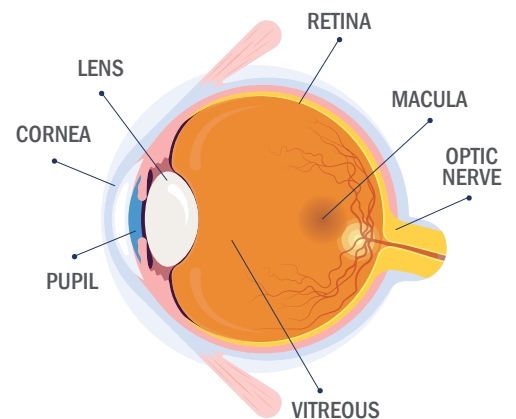
Sometimes clumps or strands form in the vitreous. What you see as ‘floaters’ are actually the shadows these clumps cast on your retina. You typically notice them when looking at something plain, such as a blank wall.

▶ FLASHES

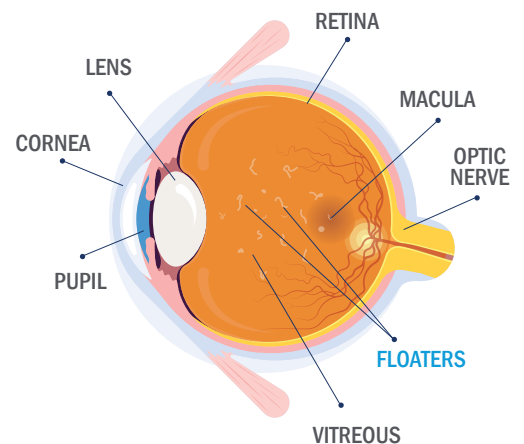
Flashers occur when the vitreous rubs or pulls on your retina.

Flashes and floaters are common as we age. Alone, they do not compromise vision. But they can be symptoms of a more serious condition, such as a **posterior vitreous detachment** (PVD) or a **retinal tear** or **retinal detachment**.

HEALTHY EYE



AFFECTED EYE



What is a PVD?

If the vitreous starts to pull away from the retina, it is called a **posterior vitreous detachment** (PVD). This can cause bleeding or a tear in the retina, which can cause a sudden onset of new floaters or flashes. The floaters caused by a PVD tend to fade over time.

It is important to distinguish PVD from a retinal detachment, which occurs when the retina is separated from its underlying blood supply and fluid builds up underneath. In many cases, a retinal tear is an emergency that requires urgent treatment.

Risk factors for PVD

PVD is common as we age, but can also occur earlier in those who are nearsighted, have had trauma or surgery, or have swelling inside the eye.

Examination and diagnostic testing

If you are experiencing flashes and floaters, your physician will probably perform a peripheral exam of your retina to check for possible retinal tears or detachments. Diagnostic imaging such as **optical coherence tomography** (OCT) is often helpful in noting this change.

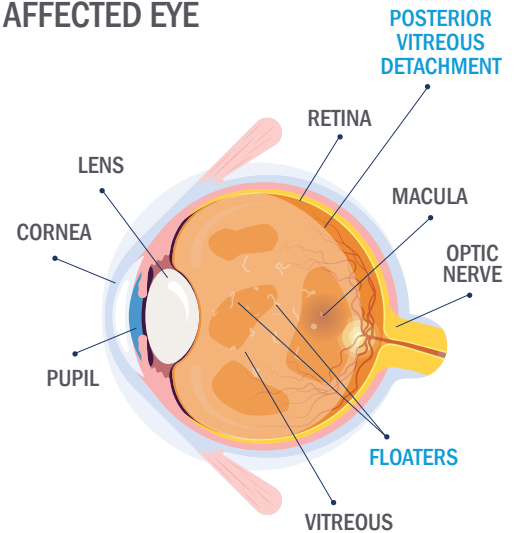
Treating floaters, flashes and PVD

Many times, floaters and flashes don't cause complications, so no treatment is necessary. **If you notice new or increasing floaters and flashes, or any change in your vision, contact your eye doctor as soon as possible.** They can evaluate whether or not you have a torn or detached retina that may require more immediate treatment. Severe floaters can be removed with surgery, but this is rarely necessary.

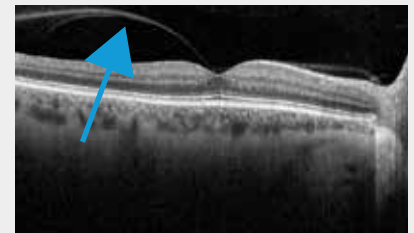
Scan here to watch a video featuring our own Dr. Matthew Benz sharing helpful video about floaters, flashes and PVD



AFFECTED EYE



WHAT YOUR DOCTOR SEES ON OCT



Partial PVD, with the vitreous (wispy white line) pulling away from the macula



Complete PVD, with the vitreous completely separated from the macula and no longer visible, with leftover 'floaters' (white specks)



Retina Consultants of Texas



RCA Research