

Floater & Flashes

An information guide



Floaters & Flashes

What are floaters?

Floaters are small specks or clouds in your field of vision.

You can often see them when looking at a plain background, like a bland wall or blue sky. Floaters are actually tiny clumps of gel or cells inside the vitreous; the clear jelly like fluid that fills the inside of your eye. Whilst these objects look like they are in front of your eye, they are actually floating inside.

What you see are the shadows they cast on the retina, the nerve layer at the back of the eye that senses light and allows you to see. Floaters can have different shapes; little dots, circles, lines, clouds or cobwebs.

What causes floaters?

When people reach middle age, the vitreous gel may start to thicken or shrink, forming clumps or strands inside the eye. The vitreous gel may pull away from the back of the eye, causing a posterior vitreous detachment (PVD). This is a common cause of floaters.

PVD is more common in people who are near (short) sighted, have undergone cataract surgery, have had Yag laser procedure of the eye, or have had inflammation inside the eye.

The appearance of floaters may be alarming, especially if they suddenly develop.

Are floaters serious?

The retina can tear if the shrinking vitreous gel pulls away from the wall of the eye. This sometimes causes a small amount of bleeding in the eye that may appear as new floaters.

A torn retina is always a serious problem, since it can lead to retinal detachment. You should return for an eye examination by your optician or ring the hospital if new floaters appear suddenly or you notice new symptoms such as loss of side vision.

What can be done about floaters?

Floaters can get in the way of clear vision, which may be quite annoying, especially if you are trying to read. You can try moving your eyes, looking up and down to move the floaters out of the way. Whilst some floaters may remain in your vision, many of them will fade with time and become less bothersome.

What is important is to eliminate other problems that may arise with floaters such as retinal tears.

What causes flashing lights?

When the vitreous gel rubs or pulls on the retina, you may see what looks like flashing lights or lightening streaks.

You may have experienced this same sensation if you have ever been hit on the eye and seen 'stars'. The flashes of light can appear off and on for several weeks or months.

As we grow older, it is more common to experience flashes. If you notice a sudden appearance of light flashes especially if associated with new floaters, you should arrange for a new eye examination by your optician or ring the hospital.

Migraine

Some people experience flashes of light that appears as jagged lines or 'heat waves' in both eyes lasting 10-12 minutes. These types of flashes are usually caused by a spasm of the blood vessels in the brain, which is called a migraine.

If a headache follows the flashes, it is a migraine headache. However, jagged lines or heat waves can occur without headache. In this case the light flashes are called ophthalmic migraine or migraine without headache.

Contact Numbers

The Royal Oldham Hospital, Oldham

A&E Department - 0161 627 8933

Friday 5pm until Monday 9am

Oldham Integrated Care Centre Eye Clinic -0161 621 3721

Monday – Friday 9am - 4.30pm

Rochdale Infirmary, Rochdale

Eye Clinic - 01706 901757

Monday - Friday 9am until 5pm.

Eye Ward - 01706 901765

Monday - Friday 8am until 8pm (answer machine after 8pm)

Urgent Care Centre - 01706 517005

Monday - Friday after 8pm. Friday 8pm until Monday 9am

Fairfield General, Bury

A&E Department - 0161 778 2600

Monday - Friday after 8pm. Friday 8pm until Monday 8am

Eye Ward and Clinic - same contact details as Rochdale Infirmary

Tameside Hospital Foundation Trust

A&E Department - 0161 922 6000

Available 24 hours

Eye secretary - 0161 331 6388

If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

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Dacă engleza nu este prima ta limbă și ai nevoie de ajutor, te rugăm să contactezi Serviciul de interpretare și traducere

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For advice on stopping smoking contact the Specialist Stop Smoking Service on 01706 517 522

For general enquiries please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0161 604 5897

For enquiries regarding clinic appointments, clinical care and treatment please contact 0161 624 0420 and the Switchboard Operator will put you through to the correct department / service

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The NCA brings together Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust and the hospitals and community services of The Royal Oldham Hospital, Fairfield General Hospital in Bury, and Rochdale Infirmary (currently part of The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust).

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