

Patient information: Accident and Emergency

Information for patients with flashes and floaters

What are flashers and floaters?

Flashes of light or black floaters that look like cobwebs or tadpoles are commonly seen by people with normal eyes. They occur because of changes in the vitreous jelly, which lies directly in front of the retina (the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye).

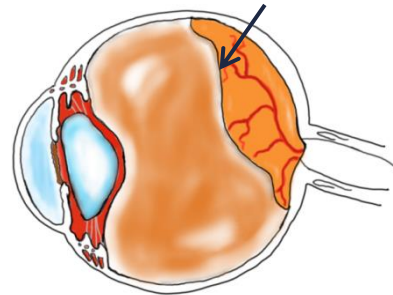
Why am I seeing flashes and floaters?

This is due to the separation of the jelly from the retina. This is a process known as posterior vitreous detachment.

This a normal part of ageing of the eye, and typically occurs in people over the age of 50. It can sometimes occur earlier however, partially if you are short-sighted or have had recent eye surgery.

Posterior vitreous detachment is usually associated with the sudden appearance of new floaters and/or flashes of light. Some patients can see floaters for many years before the vitreous separation actually occurs.

Posterior vitreous detachment



Does a posterior vitreous detachment need treatment?

No. In 90% of patients this process is entirely harmless, and no treatment is required.

In about 1 in 10 people when the vitreous detaches, it can cause bleeding inside the eye or create a tear or detachment of the retina. These are sight-threatening changes that may require urgent treatment with laser or surgery.

