

Floaters

WHAT ARE FLOATERS?

Vitreous floaters, often called ‘floaters’, ‘floaties’ or ‘spots’ are clouded or semi-opaque specks or particles within the eye that are seen in the field of vision.

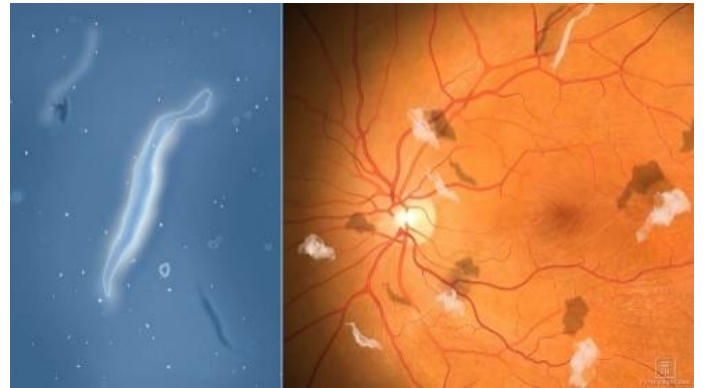
They are more commonly seen when in bright environments like looking at the sky or at a white wall or page.

WHAT CAUSES FLOATERS?

The eyes are filled with “jelly-like” substance known as the Vitreous Humor that maintains the shape of the eye.

Often, particles of protein or other natural materials are left floating or suspended in this “jelly” when the eye is formed before birth.

If the particles are large or close together, they cast shadows that make them visible.



In most cases this is normal, but floaters can also be caused by eye injuries, eye disease or separation of the vitreous from the back surface of the eye.

WHAT DO FLOATERS LOOK LIKE?

This varies greatly among people.

Some are only slightly noticeable while others may be disturbing when they drift in the field of vision.

Often, they appear as dust-like particles, cobwebs, or thread-like strands. They can also appear as dim or dark areas, or showers of brilliant crystals.

Because floaters move as the eye moves, they dart away when you try to look directly at them.

HOW ARE THEY DETECTED?

Often floaters can be detected during a comprehensive eye examination with your optometrist.

By looking inside the eye, the optometrist may detect floaters before the patient becomes aware of them.

If the floaters indicate disease or other problems requiring care, the patient will be referred to the appropriate health care practitioner.

CAN THESE FLOATERS CAUSE BLINDNESS?

Most floaters are normal and rarely cause blindness.

However, some floaters can be indicative of more serious problems.

A sudden increase in the number or size of floaters can indicate the early stages of a retinal detachment.

If you notice a change in the number or size of the floaters you see, or if you notice unusual flashes in your vision, you should present to your optometrist to have your eyes examined urgently.

CAN FLOATERS BE PREVENTED?

Because the particles in the vitreous that cause the floaters are generally a normal development of the formation of the eye, they cannot be prevented.

Large floaters that persist for longer than 6 months can be treatment by an Ophthalmologist with a procedure known as laser vitreolysis where the floaters are hit and dissipated with a laser.

Another treatment available is a vitrectomy where the vitreous gel is removed from the eye and replaced with a clear liquid.

Both procedures are invasive and come with high risks. Therefore, they will only be considered if the impact of the floaters to your quality of life is high.



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