

WORDS TO KNOW:

Vitreous - The clear gel-like substance that fills the inside of the eye (pronounced: VIH-tree-us)

Retina - The light-sensitive layer lining the back of the eye (pronounced: reh-TIN-a)

WHAT ARE FLOATERS?

Small specks or clouds moving in your field of vision as you look at a blank wall or a clear blue sky are known as floaters. Floaters look like cobwebs, squiggly lines, or floating bugs; and appear to be in front of the eye but are actually floating inside the eye. Most people have some floaters but do not notice them.

WHAT CAUSES FLOATERS?

In most cases, floaters are part of the natural aging process. As we get older the vitreous gel tends to shrink slightly and detach from the retina, forming clumps within the eye. This is called a 'posterior vitreous detachment' (PVD). What you see are the shadows that these clumps cast on the retina.

WHAT ARE FLASHES?

Flashes look like sparks or lightning streaks, and can last a few seconds. You may have experienced the same visual sensation if you have ever been hit in the eye and seen stars.

WHAT CAUSES FLASHES?

When the vitreous gel is detaching from the retina it can pull on the retina, causing flashing lights to appear.

HOW TO DEAL WITH FLOATERS:

Floaters can get in the way of clear vision, often when reading. Try looking up and then down to move the floaters out of the way. Floaters are always physically present but you will notice them less over time as you adapt to them.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FLOATERS AND FLASHES:

RETINAL TEARS - When the vitreous is detaching, it can (on rare occasions) cause a tear in the retina. A torn retina should be sealed with a laser, as untreated retinal tears can get larger, and lead to a retinal detachment.

RETINAL DETACHMENT - The main symptom of a retinal detachment is seeing a "curtain shade" coming down over part of your vision and not going away. Retinal detachments are fixed with surgery. Visual recovery takes several weeks after retinal detachment surgery.

IF YOU NOTICE MORE FLOATERS, MORE FLASHES, OR A "CURTAIN SHADE" COMING OVER YOUR VISION, CONTACT YOUR EYE DOCTOR DURING BUSINESS HOURS, OR VISIT MISERICORDIA HEALTH CENTRE.

EYE EMERGENCY?

Misericordia is open 24/7 for patients experiencing urgent eye issues: please present at Patient Registration through our 99 Cornish Avenue entrance.