

## Floaters And Retinal Complications

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A Sixty-year-old lady came to my centre with complaints of sudden onset of some shadow in front of her eye. She said that she was taking her walk in the morning when all of a sudden a black 'thing' floated in front of her eyes.

At first she thought it was an insect but it persisted. Then she got worried and irritated as this small 'thing' moved with the movement of her eye. Finally when it didn't disappear she came for a consultation.

This is what a patient with complaints of 'Floaters' typically describes.

Floaters are tiny specks which move with the eye movement. The patient may perceive them as flies or mosquitoes or cobwebs which come in the field of vision. They may be disturbing the person while doing reading or any activity. They are appreciated more on a white background or in bright light.

The eyeball is like a globe, filled with a jelly called vitreous. This vitreous is transparent and provides nutrition to inner part of the eye.

It lies behind the lens and in front of retina. Vitreous is firmly adherent to retina at few areas.

This vitreous jelly undergoes degeneration because of various reasons like ageing, in myopic eyes even at an early age or after an eye surgery like cataract. Because of degeneration, there are areas of condensation within this jelly or pockets of liquification. These areas cast a shadow on retina which one sees as floaters.

These floaters are innocuous till they are few in number. But if they increase in number suddenly or are associated with flashes of light, one should get his eyes checked. The flashes of light indicate the pull on retina by vitreous at the areas of adhesion. This pull on retina may cause tears in the retina and lead to retinal detachment.

There is no treatment for the floaters as they indicate just degeneration of vitreous like graying of hair one has to ignore them.

But floaters if increase in number suddenly or if associated with flashes of light is a signal for us. One should get his eyes checked in detail as early as possible to prevent major problem like detachment from occurring.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

1. What are Floaters?

Floaters are actually tiny clumps of gel or cells inside the vitreous.

2. How do they look like?

Floaters may look like insects, specks, strands, cobwebs etc.

3. How common are floaters?

Very common. Over 70 % of the population experiences these problems.

4. If one eye develops floaters will the other eye develop them as well?  
Very likely; In the case of a posterior vitreous separation, it is very common for the same condition to occur in the second eye within a year.
5. Can floaters cause total blindness?  
No, only a slight blockage of the vision at worst.
6. What is the treatment for floaters?  
If light flashes are due to a posterior vitreous separation and no retinal breaks are found on careful examination with the pupil dilated, no treatment is necessary. If the doctor finds tears, laser or occasionally freezing (cryo) treatment is needed. A vitrectomy can be used to remove floaters but is very rarely indicated because the complication rate is higher than the advantages.
7. Is there a medication or eye drop for the treatment for flashes or floaters?  
No, there is no medicine, eye drop, vitamin, herb, or diet that is beneficial to patients with flashes or floaters.
8. Do Floaters ever disappear?  
Most floaters are condensed vitreous collagen fibers and never completely disappear but they become much less obvious over time.
9. What does one do in case of appearance of floaters?  
Immediately consult an ophthalmologist. Get a dilated fundus examination done to rule out any retinal complication like detachment, hole, and vitreous hemorrhage.

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