

Floaters (Vitreous Degeneration)

- **What is a floater?** Floaters are small grayish semi-transparent specks in the vitreous of the eye. The vitreous is a clear jelly-like fluid which gives the eye its shape. These floaters can be of various shapes and sizes from small specks to large cobwebs, since they are within the eye they move as your eyes move and dart away when you try to look at them directly.
- **What causes a floater?** Floaters are most commonly a result of deterioration of the vitreous due to aging. The thick jelly shrinks and becomes more liquefied causing the fibers to clump together. These clumps float around within the vitreous casting a shadow on the retina, making them appear as floaters.
- **When should I worry about a floater?** Floaters are usually not harmful (just annoying) but they can sometimes be an indication of a different issue such as a **posterior vitreous detachment** or a more serious issue like a **retinal detachment**.
 - **What is a posterior vitreous detachment?** This is a harmless normal process of the eye that occurs to everyone after 55 years of the age. As the vitreous shrinks and liquefies, it pulls away from the retina, the neuro-sensory part of the eye, and this is known as a Posterior vitreous detachment. It is important to note that a vitreous detachment is not a painful experience and this usually results in a sudden onset of an often large floater in the center of the vision
 - **What is a retinal detachment?** A retinal detachment may manifest from many etiologies like diabetic retinopathy, trauma, or even a posterior vitreous detachment. Occasionally when the vitreous detaches from the retina, it can tug on it, leading to a retinal tear or detachment. Floaters can also manifest from a retinal detachment. For that reason a sudden increase in the number of floaters in an eye warrants a thorough eye exam paying special attention to the vitreous and retina for signs of retinal detachment.
- **What are the signs I should look for in a retinal detachment?**
 - Sudden onset of a new large floater or a sudden onset of many floaters.
 - Flashes of light in your vision.
 - Loss of vision similar to a curtain coming over your vision.
- **Is there a treatment for floaters?** There is no treatment for floaters (other than monitoring) for complications, which are fortunately rare. While some floaters may remain in your vision, many of them will fade over time and become less bothersome. Even if you have had some floaters for years, you should have an eye examination immediately if you notice new ones.

