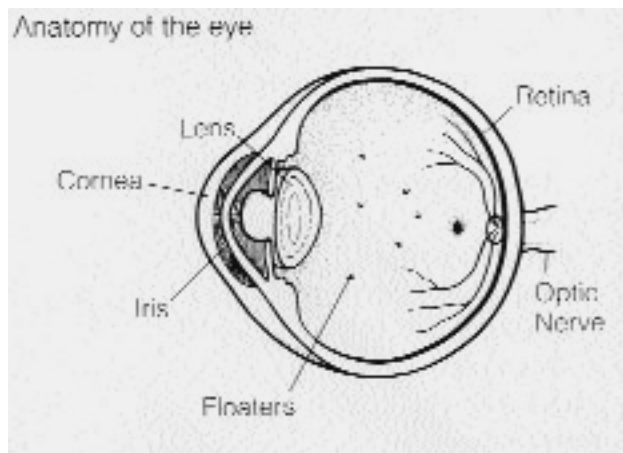




**AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF OPHTHALMOLOGY**
The Eye M.D. Association

What are floaters?

You may sometimes see small specks or clouds moving in your field of vision. They are called floaters. You can often see them when looking at a plain background, like a blank wall or blue sky. Floaters are actually tiny clumps of gel or cells inside the **vitreous**, the clear jelly-like fluid that fills the inside of your eye. While these objects look like they are in front of your eye, they are actually floating inside. What you see are the shadows they cast on the **retina**, the nerve layer at the back of the eye that senses light and allows you to see.



Floaters can have different shapes: little dots, circles, lines, clouds or cobwebs.

What causes floaters?

When people reach middle age, the vitreous gel may start to thicken or shrink, forming clumps or strands inside the eye. The vitreous gel pulls away from the back wall of the eye, causing a **posterior vitreous detachment**. It is a common cause of floaters.

What can be done about floaters?

Floaters can get in the way of clear vision, which may be quite annoying, especially if you are trying to read. You can try moving your eyes, looking up and then down to move the floaters out of the way.

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.

What causes flashing lights?

When the vitreous gel rubs or pulls on the retina, you may see what look like flashing lights or lightning streaks. You may have experienced this same sensation if you have ever been hit in the eye and seen "stars."

The flashes of light can appear off and on for several weeks or months. As we grow older, it is more common to experience flashes. If you notice the sudden appearance of light flashes, you should visit your ophthalmologist immediately.

Are floaters or flashes ever serious?

The retina can tear if the shrinking vitreous gel pulls away from the wall of the eye. This sometimes causes a small amount of bleeding in the eye that may appear as new floaters. A **retina tear** is always a serious problem, since it can lead to a **retinal detachment**. The symptoms of a retinal tear or detachment are:

- new floaters appear suddenly;
- you see sudden flashes of light;
- you notice a loss of side vision.

Although a retinal tear or detachment is rare, you should see your ophthalmologist as soon as possible if you notice these symptoms.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact your ophthalmologist at:

BRIGHTBILL/ERICSON EYE ASSOCIATES



2929 McFarland Rd. • Rockford, IL 61107 • 815-654-2020 • www.6542020.com