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VISION CARE: FLOATERS

Are you seeing tiny specks in your field of vision? Are they small, dark, shadowy shapes resembling spots, strands of thread, or squiggly lines? If so, you may be experiencing eye floaters.

Floaters

Floaters occur as part of the natural aging process. Usually harmless, they are more of an annoyance. Floaters are most noticeable when looking at something bright, such as white paper or a blue sky. They can be distracting, but with time may eventually settle at the bottom of the eye, becoming less noticeable. Floaters never really go away, but you can learn to ignore them, unless they become more numerous or prominent.

Causes

Floaters are most common in older individuals or those who are nearsighted. Patients who have had cataract or laser eye surgery may also experience an increase in floaters as a result of severe inflammation in the eye. Floaters develop as a result of changes in the makeup of the jelly-like fluid inside the eyes, called the vitreous. As you age, this gel thickens and shrinks, pulls away from the internal lining of the eye, and essentially breaks down. As a result, small clumps of protein may form, and light entering the eye reflects off these particles, causing you to see floaters.

Symptoms

Floaters come in many shapes and sizes. You may experience only a few or several floaters at any one time, but they usually occur in only one eye at a time. It is also possible to experience a quick, arc-shaped flash of light in the corner of the eye when seeing floaters.

This “lightning flash” may occur intermittently for several weeks or months, and then simply disappear.

Diagnosis

If you begin to notice an increase in floaters, persistent flashing lights, or a veil-like blockage of a portion of your vision, you should consult an eye care professional. These symptoms may be a sign of a rare but serious condition affecting your retina, such as a hole, tear, or detachment.

Treatment

Currently, there is no method available to remove floaters with surgery, laser treatment, or medication. However, if your eye care professional is able to determine your floaters are related to a more serious condition, like a retinal hole, tear, or detachment, laser repair or surgery may be performed.



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