

FLOATERS AND SPOTS

Q What are floaters?

A Floaters – or spots, as they are sometimes called are usually clouded or semi-opaque specks or particles within the eye that are seen in the field of vision.

Q What causes floaters?

A The eyes are filled with fluid which maintains the shape of the eye, supplies it with nutrition and aids in the focusing of light. Often, particles of protein or other natural materials are left floating or suspended in this fluid when the eye is formed before birth. If the particles are large or close together, they cast shadows which make them visible. This is particularly true when nearsightedness occurs or becomes more severe. In most cases this is normal but floaters can also be caused by certain injuries, eye disease or deterioration of eye fluid or its surrounding structures.

Q Can they affect people of all ages?

A Yes. Many people see floaters at one time or another. As one becomes older, changes are more likely to occur in the eyes which cause floaters that can be of a more serious nature or cause the usual floaters to be more noticeable.

Q What do floaters look like?

This varies greatly among people. Some are only slightly noticeable while others may be disturbing when they drift in the field of vision. Often they appear as dust-like particles, cobwebs or thread-like strands. They can also appear as dim or dark areas, or showers of brilliant crystals. Because floaters move as the eye moves, they dart away when the patient tries to look directly at them.

Q How are they detected?

A Often floaters can be detected during a complete optometric examination. By looking inside the eye with an instrument called an ophthalmoscope, the optometrist may detect floaters before the patient becomes aware of them. If the floaters indicate disease or other problems requiring care, the patient will be referred to the appropriate health care practitioner.

Q Can these floaters cause blindness?

A Most floaters are normal and rarely cause blindness. However, because floaters can be indications of more serious problems, patients seeing floaters should have a complete vision examination to determine the cause. In particular, a sudden increase in the number or size of floaters can indicate the early stages of a retinal detachment. If you notice a change in the number or size of the floaters you see, or if you notice unusual flashes in your vision, you should have your eyes examined immediately.

Q Can floaters be prevented?

A Because the particles causing floaters are generally a normal development of the formation of the eye, they cannot be prevented.

This brochure is produced by the Australian Optometrical Association
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