



What is a retinal tear or retinal detachment? Is it serious?

In a very few people it is possible for the jelly to pull so hard that it tears the retina. A retinal tear can then lead to a retinal detachment where the retinal layer starts to peel off the back of the inside of the eyeball.

This is serious and it is essential to receive prompt treatment to minimise the damage to the eye and to reduce the loss of vision.

See the blue box 'When to seek help urgently'.

What is the treatment for a retinal detachment?

If you get help early it may be possible to repair the tear with laser or freezing treatment under a local anaesthetic.

Frequently an operation is needed under general anaesthetic to repair the tear or put the retina back in place. This might need an overnight stay in hospital.

The amount of vision saved depends on the size of the tear or detachment.

Where can I get further information on flashes and floaters?

Further information is available at www.rnib.org.uk.

ACES (Acute Community Eyecare Service for Somerset) has been developed in partnership with the Local Optical Committee

NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group,
Wynford House, Lufton Way, Yeovil, Somerset, BA22 8HR
Phone: 01935 384000 Fax: 01935 384079
Email: enquiries@somersetccg.nhs.uk

Flashes and Floaters

Information for patients in Somerset



Do you get flashes of light in your vision?
Do you get black spots before your eyes?
Do you get cobwebs in your vision?
Then read this leaflet.

This leaflet can be provided
in other formats or languages
on request

When to seek help urgently

If you are experiencing flashes and/or floaters in your vision, seek urgent advice within 24 hours from an Acute Community Eyecare Service (ACES) accredited optometrist or your GP.

If you have already seen your optometrist, GP or hospital doctor about your flashes and floaters and these symptoms get worse, you **must** still seek advice.

A less serious condition **may** have changed into a more serious condition. It is vital to get help to avoid permanent damage to your vision.

So seek help urgently if you have:

- A sudden increase in the number or size of floaters
- A sudden increase in flashes of light in your vision

What are floaters?

Most people get black spots floating in their field of vision at some time. As you get older they can appear more often.

Sometimes the spots look fuzzy and as if they are strung together on a thread. The eyeball is filled with a jelly like material called the vitreous.

The black spots are the shadows of little bits of protein floating in the jelly. The spots move with our eyes and stop when we keep still.

What are flashes?

The jelly becomes more liquid as we get older and so moves about inside the eyeball.

The jelly is attached to the retina which is the light sensitive layer at the back of the inside of the eyeball. The retina receives pictures and sends them to the brain to enable us to see.

The liquid jelly can move about so much that it starts pulling on the retina. This pulling on the retina sends a signal up to the brain which we experience as flashes of light.

What is a Posterior Vitreous Detachment (PVD)? Is it serious?

As the moving jelly pulls on the retina the jelly can begin to break away or detach from the retina. This is called a PVD.

PVD is very common especially as we get older. It can occur in many people in their 50's. About three out of every four people over the age of 65 develop PVD.

There is no treatment for PVD and the flashes of light seen in your vision become less frequent over time. You become less aware of the floaters except perhaps in bright light.

PVD itself is not serious, although in a few people there is a chance that a retinal tear may develop which is more serious.

This is why even if you have already had professional advice about your flashes and floaters, you should seek help urgently if there is a sudden change in your symptoms.

See the blue box 'When to seek help urgently'.