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Floaters Information

Do I have floaters

If you see black or grey specks of squiggly lines, strings, dots or cobwebs that float around when you move your eyes, then it could be floaters in your vision.

If you see a black shadow, flashes or curtain effect, or you suddenly lose vision please attend the A&E department without delay.

What are floaters?

Floaters are shapes that we see due to small pieces of debris that 'float' in the back of the eye. In the back of the eye, we have a very transparent jelly like substance called 'vitreous' which is firmly attached to the retina. As we age, this jelly gets separated from retina and liquefies breaking up into smaller pieces. This smaller semi-transparent detached jelly casts shadows on the retina and this shadow is perceived as floaters.

What do floaters look like?

Floaters appear in the front of the eye, and can occur in a number of different shapes and sizes. They are particularly obvious when you see at bright uniform background. If you try to look at floaters, they keep moving away from you vision. They can be of various shapes like semi-transparent hair, black or grey specks of squiggly lines, tadpole like or small fly like or cob-web shapes that drift across the vision

Will I be affected by floaters

Floaters usually do not interfere with your vision and are harmless. In 70% of people, by the age of 70, the vitreous gel can get separated from retina and liquefies breaking up into smaller pieces. This is known as posterior vitreous detachment (PVD). When this happens people can see a sudden shower of increasing floaters. Majority of us learn to ignore floaters over few months, However, in some patients the floaters may persist affecting the quality of vision with difficulty in performing daily tasks, Short sighted people tend to suffer from them and they increase, as we age. Eye inflammation is a rare cause of floaters.

Could floaters cause serious problem

In majority of patient floaters represents normal aging changes of the eye and they are harmless. Rarely in about 10% of patients who develop posterior vitreous detachment can have retinal tear which will need treatment with laser. The retinal tear if untreated in the initial stage can lead to 'retinal detachment', similar to wallpaper peeling off a wall. This can cause blindness and that is why it is important to have dilated complete retinal examination immediately after noticing new floaters or change in vision.

What is the treatment for floaters

Floaters are harmless and become less obvious over time. As floaters do not cause significant visual problem in majority of patients, we generally do not recommend any form of treatment. However, in some patients the floaters may persist affecting the quality of vision with difficulty in performing daily tasks. In those patients Vitrectomy operation can be done to remove vitreous along with floaters.

Vitrectomy Surgery for floaters - Sutureless

This involves a surgical procedure whereby the vitreous jelly is removed (Vitrectomy) from inside the eye along with floaters. The vitrectomy surgery is performed through three key-holes in the eye which does not require suturing.

In some cases, special gas bubble is left inside the eye which will dissolve on its own after few weeks. If gas is used, you will be asked to position your head in a certain way for some part of the day for up to 7 days and you must not fly or go high altitude until gas bubble disappears. The operation can be performed under local or general anaesthesia as a day case procedure, which usually takes about 30 minutes. If there is a cataract along with floaters, then cataract is also removed at the same time as a single procedure.

How successful is the surgery

This surgery has very high success rate in removing troublesome central floaters. It is impossible to remove all floaters and some patients may still see few floaters even after surgery, but they will be lot less compared to pre-surgery floaters and these floaters generally do not require additional surgery.

What are the risks of vitrectomy surgery

As with any procedure, there may be risks involved and you should discuss this with Mr Viswanathan before you give consent for surgery. Common complications to be aware of include:

Cataract (clouding of the natural lens of the eye, sometimes cataract is also removed at the same time as vitrectomy)

Retinal detachment in 5%

Bleeding – very rare but if severe it can result in blindness

Infection – very rare about 1 in 1000, but can lead to blindness

Ending up with worse vision after surgery in about 10%

Cystoid macular oedema – Swelling of central retina in about 10%

Persistently raised eye pressure about 1 %

Sympathetic endophthalmitis - a very rare condition in which surgery in one eye triggers inflammation and sight problems in the other (1:10,000)

What to expect after the operation

Vitrectomy surgery for floaters is a major operation and it is normal to experience some discomfort in the eye following surgery. In some cases, special gas bubble is left inside the eye which will dissolve on its own after few weeks. If gas is used, you may be asked to position your head in a certain way for some part of the day for up to 7 days. The white of the eye may appear red with swelling to the eyelid. You may have some watering of the eye and a gritty sensation in the eye which slowly disappears in few days. You will be given eye drops to use for few weeks. You can shower or bath but avoid getting water directly into the eye, abstain from unhygienic environments, strenuous physical work and anything that puts the eye at risk of injury.

When will be the follow up appointment

You will be reviewed usually after one week and again after 4 weeks. Your vision in that eye will be blurred for a few weeks after the operation but it should improve slowly over time. Mr Viswanathan will discuss your final expected visual outcome of your surgery. If you have any concerns, please discuss this with your surgeon.

How much time will I need off work

You will need rest from work for about two weeks. If gas bubble left inside the eye, we advise against driving until gas bubble disappears for the first few weeks while the vision improves. The duration of time off work depends on the kind of work you do. However, any work-related or driving related concerns should be discussed with your surgeon.

Where can I find further information

Understanding macula hole surgery can be complicated. This information leaflet may not cover all the concerns you may have about this procedure. Further information can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Floaters/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<https://beavrs.org/floaters>

<https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-are-floaters-flashes>

Scientific Evidence

The information mentioned here is based on a variety of sources, including latest published research and the Britain & Eire Association of Vitreoretinal Surgeons.

Disclaimer

It is impossible to diagnose and treat patients without complete eye examination by an ophthalmologist. I hope the above information will be of help before and after a consultation which this information supplements and does not replace. This information must not be used as a substitute for professional medical care by a qualified doctor or other health care professional.

If you have any concerns about your condition or treatment, please ask your surgeon Mr Viswanathan. We are not responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for ANY form of damages whatsoever resulting from the use (or misuse) of information contained in this page or found on web pages linked to from this page.

<https://viswa.uk/floaters>

