

FLASHES AND FLOATERS / RETINAL DETACHMENT

New floaters or flashing lights are a very common and mostly harmless event.

Your eye is filled with jelly and this is usually as clear as an egg white. If a small sediment develops then this is seen as a dark floater. It is usually more obvious against a bright background like the sky or a white wall. It “floats” around in your vision as if it were a fly. If it is a long strand then it looks like a cobweb or a squiggle. If it is circular it looks like a round oval. Over half the population gets floaters and they are almost always just part of the aging process, especially in myopes (short sighted people).



As the jelly in the eye shrinks with age it pulls away from the retina which lines the inside of the eye. If it tugs at the retina as it shrinks then it will cause a flashing light. Mostly the jelly pulls away and there is no problem. Rarely however, the jelly is quite adherent to the retina and it causes a tear in the retina which could precipitate a retinal detachment leading to severe vision loss.

Therefore, every flasher or floater must be investigated, so we do not miss the rare cases of retinal tear amongst the vast majority who have no problem to worry about.

The eye doctor will have checked your eye for the signs of retinal tear.

You should report back with any of the following symptoms:

- Persistent flashes like a lightning bolt or flash camera.
- Clusters of new floaters like a bee swarm or a large patch of floaters all grouped together.
- A cloud or mist which obscures part or your vision.

You must be adequately concerned enough to notice these problems if they occur but not overly anxious to imagine every one of these. Go about your business as usual. Exercise is quite all right. If problems were to develop then they are usually obvious.

Please contact us directly on 02 9635 0663 for general queries - for any urgent or After-hours Emergencies please contact Sydney Eye Hospital 9382 7111 and speak to the eye registrar.