Eye Floaters

A jelly-like fluid fills the inside of the eye and is called the vitreous. The vitreous is normally clear. It allows light to pass through to the back of the eye to the tissues that contain the nerves needed for vision (the *retina*). With age, the vitreous can start to decline. If a decline happens, specks of material from clumps of cells, blood, or other materials may start to float around inside the eye. These objects cast shadows on the retina. These shadows are seen as moving strings, streaks, "bugs," dust or spider webs floating in front of the eye.

CAUSES

- Age.
- A high degree of near-sightedness (*high myopia*).
- Tears in the retina.
- Bleeding inside the eye from broken retinal blood vessels as a result of disease (diabetes, inflammation of the retinal blood vessels, and others).
- Blood clot of the major vein of the retina or its branches (*retinal vein occlusion*).
- Trauma.
- Retinal detachment.
- Vitreous detachment.
- Eye surgery.
- Inflammation inside the eye (*uveitis*).
- Infection inside the eye.

SYMPTOMS

- Seeing floating specs, dots or spider webs in the vision of one eye. This can sometimes be associated with flashes of light seen off to the side.
- Bleeding in the eye may begin as floaters and lead to complete vision loss as the vitreous fills with blood. This may happen repeatedly in certain diseases of the blood vessels of the retina (e.g. diabetes).
- If the vitreous shrinks enough to pull away from the retina (*posterior vitreous detachment*), a small circular ring-shaped floater may be seen.

Migraine headaches may be associated with many forms of visual symptoms (sparkling dots, wavy lines) just before the headache strikes. These symptoms due to migraine are not from floaters. They will disappear when the headache goes away.

DIAGNOSIS

An eye professional can tell you if you have floaters during an eye exam.

TREATMENT

There is no treatment for the floaters themselves.

- If the floaters are due to a tear in the retina, a retinal detachment or other eye disease, the condition that caused the floaters must be treated.
- Floaters due to blood in the eye often go away or lessen with time.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You suddenly see floating dots or spider webs in front of the vision of one or both eyes. This is especially true if you also see flashes of light off to the side (like flashes of lightening).
- You see floaters and also notice a change or drop in your vision in either eye.

Document Released: 12/20/2004 Document Re-Released: 04/18/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.