

# Devon in Sight Eye Condition Fact Sheet 13

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## Flashes and Floaters

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### Introduction

When we are young, the gel inside your eye (the vitreous) is firmly attached to the back of your eye. As we get older, the vitreous gel naturally becomes more liquid and collapses away from the retina. This is called posterior vitreous detachment (PVD). It is very common and more likely to happen as you get older.

### What are flashes?

As the vitreous pulls away from your retina you may see this as a flash of light in one or both eyes, like small sparkles, lightning or fireworks. The flashes tend to be in the extreme corners of your vision and come and go, but don't obscure any part of your vision. They are different from the shimmering or zig-zag lines that may be part of a migraine. Very occasionally, flashes can be a sign of **retinal detachment**, which should be treated as soon as possible.

### What are floaters?

Floaters are small dark or transparent dots or strands or something that looks like a hair or small pieces of a cobweb that float in the vitreous gel inside your eye. They are formed when the **vitreous**, which is the jelly inside your eye, separates into watery fluid and wavy collagen fibres. They appear to float in front of your eyes and move when you try to look at them. They are very common and are normally harmless.

### Who is affected by flashes and floaters?

Flashes and floaters are more common in older people, people who are **short-sighted** and in people who have had eye surgery.

## What are the symptoms of flashes and floaters?

Flashes appear as small sparkles, lightening or fireworks usually in the extreme corners of your vision. They may come and go. Floaters are more visible in bright light, or if you are looking at a plain bright background such as a cloudless sky or white wall. Usually, the symptoms are nothing to worry about and you can get used to them. However, if you have any of the following symptoms, you should contact your optometrist as soon as possible:

- a sudden increase in floaters, particularly if you also notice flashing lights
- a new, large, floater
- a change in floaters or flashing lights after you have had a direct blow to your eye
- a shadow or cobweb spreading across the vision of one of your eyes.
- If you can't contact your optometrist you should get urgent attention, ideally from an eye casualty department at the hospital. If you cannot get to an eye casualty you should go to a hospital A&E department.

## How do you treat flashes and floaters?

Flashes normally settle down after a few months without treatment. Floaters may be long lasting, but you tend to ignore them after a while. There is usually no treatment required for these conditions.

## Information, Advice and Support

College of Optometrists "Through my eyes video" shows what your vision can be like with floaters"

**Website link:** <https://lookafteryoureyes.org/eye-conditions/flashes-and-floaters/>

## What to do next?

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms or your sight loss deteriorates, please contact your GP/Optician/Accident & Emergency Department at your local Hospital.

If you need any further advice call our Helpline: 01392 876 666

**Devon in Sight** is a member of the **Helpline Partnership Community**.

## Credit

We would like to thank the **Royal College of Optometrists** for their kind permission to reproduce this information.

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## Further Support Available from Devon in Sight

- **Information, Advice and Guidance**
  - **Demonstrations of Low Vision Aids & Daily Living Equipment**
  - **Assistive Technology Solutions**
  - **Our holistic needs assessment (Sight Loss MOT)**
  - **Training for people with central vision loss (Skills for Seeing)**
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**Devon in Sight** is not a medical organisation; therefore we can only provide general information that is not intended to be a substitute for a proper medical assessment. Our information is not intended to be used for individual cases. If you have a specific question about your eye condition, we recommend that you consult an eye care professional.

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Our Information, Advice & Guidance Resources were correct at the time of writing. However, due to research and medical advances, the content may not be completely up to date.

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## Devon in Sight Contact Information



**Helpline 01392 876 666**  
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