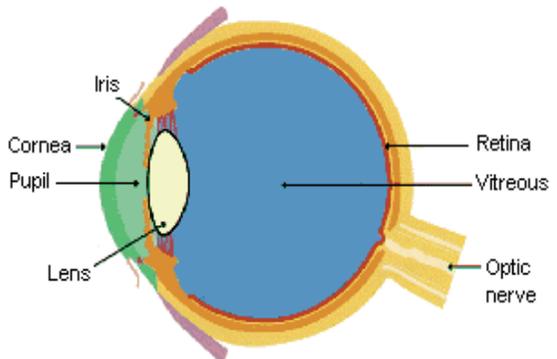# Flashes and Floaters

What are floaters?

Often, people who have healthy eyes see floaters. They appear as spots, lines or cobweb effects, usually when you look at a plain surface such as a white wall or a clear blue sky. They often appear when the clear jelly in the main part of the eye gets older.

What are flashes?

Sometimes the jelly in the main part of your eye shrinks a little and tugs on the retina (the light-sensitive layer) at the back of the eye. This can cause flashes of light at the edge of your vision. These differ from the disturbances of vision that can occur with migraine.

When should I be concerned?

If you suddenly notice a shower of new floaters, or floaters along with flashes or a dark shadow or 'curtain' in your vision, then you should seek advice urgently. These symptoms can mean that the retina is tearing. Go to an Accident and Emergency Department if necessary.

Cross-section diagram of the normal eye.

What will happen if the retina tears?

The retina is at the back of your eye. It receives the images and sends them to the brain. This is one of the things that enables you to see. If the retina tears, it may come away from the back wall of the eye. This is called **retinal detachment**. It can result in partial or complete loss of vision.

How is retinal detachment treated?

A tear may be treated by using a laser. If treated quickly, you may have a better chance of full recovery. However, if your retina has become detached, you will need surgery. The operation may restore most of your vision but may come too late for a full recovery.

Look out for:

- flashes or floaters getting worse

- a black shadow in your vision

- a sudden cloud of spots

- a curtain or veil over your vision

- any sudden loss of vision.

Go to an Accident and Emergency Department without delay if you notice any of these symptoms.

EYE UNIT
Accident & Emergency Department

Tel: 01202 704181

Royal Bournemouth & Christchurch
Hospitals NHS Trust **NHS**