

EYE HEALTHCARE

RETINAL DETACHMENT

The retina is a thin layer of nerve tissue at the back of your eye, responsible for forming an optical image which results in sight. It is loosely attached to underlying tissue and can separate from this blood filled layer resulting in '**Retinal detachment**'.

It occurs in approximately 1 in 10,000 people, where trauma to the head, short-sightedness and age are the biggest contributory factors.

People generally report a definite '**Dark Curtain**' coming over one side of their peripheral vision which is quite obvious. This is often associated with **photopsia** (flashing lights) and excessive **floaters** (black spots) in their vision and is pain free. Similar symptoms can occur in migraine but generally fade after 1-2 hours. We as opticians also search for bronze 'tobacco dust' (schaffers sign) in the anterior vitreous.

Should you experience these symptoms, report to your local Optician or GP immediately to get clarification or report directly to Eye Casualty if out of hours. The degree of retinal damage (from nutrient starvation) is greatly minimised with prompt action, even although there will be false alarms.

Treating quickly with Cryotherapy (freezing treatment) and laser creates scar tissue which seals the hole (retinal tear) that causes detachment. For full blown detachment, surgery is the only option. The final vision result is determined by how much of the retina was detached and for how long, with ensuing settle down taking approximately 3-4 weeks.

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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 your 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 your eye. This can cause flashes of light at the edge of your vision. These differ from the disturbance 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.

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 enable 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

