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Q What are floaters? Anything I can do to prevent them?

A The term "floaters" refers to small deposits or strands of tissue that move within the jelly material inside the eye. As we age, this material begins to liquefy, causing floaters. Floaters are sometimes described as dust, black spots, spider webs, or insects in your vision. Most of the time they will move with your eyes. Floaters can happen at any age but are usually first noticed in our 20s. About 65% of the population has large floaters by age 65. People more at risk are older, female, nearsighted, chromium deficient, or have a history of head/eye trauma, eye surgery, or inflammation within the eye. Chromium deficiency can increase your chances eightfold of having floaters. A very large percentage of Americans are chromium deficient, with some studies estimating as high as 80%.

As we get older, we can suddenly develop a new, large floater called a PVD or posterior vitreous detachment. This causes you to feel like something moved in your peripheral vision and may cause flashes of light in your side vision. About 8 to 10% of the time a PVD can cause a retinal break. A retinal break can lead to a retinal detachment. Signs of a retinal detachment can include a dark shade or curtain in your vision, a paprika haze, and/or onset of many new floaters. If you have signs of a new PVD or detached retina you should see an eye doctor immediately for a dilated eye examination. There are no eye drops that help floaters. Incisional surgery is only rarely performed to remove very large floaters. Most floaters are benign and after initial presentation your brain will slowly begin to ignore them, especially as they settle due to gravity. Avoid aspartame (often found in diet soda), it may weaken the retina. Nutrients that may strengthen the retina include lutein, zeaxanthin, bilberry, and resveratrol, to name a few. Some foods that are good for your eyes include green leafy vegetables, blueberries, green tea, and red wine (in moderation).

Dr. Nathan Schramm, O.D., C.N.S. Is an Optometric Physician and a Certified Nutrition Specialist. He practices in Gainesville, Ocala, Summerfield, The Villages, Williston, and Inverness. Dr. Schramm is currently accepting new patients and can be reached at 888-781-2020 or via email: gr8eyedoc@gmail.com. This article is not intended to replace a full eye examination by a qualified medical professional. A special thanks to Dr. Elias C. Mavrofrides, M.D., A vitreoretinal specialist, and Dr. Julie Abra- ham, O.D., For editorial support.

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