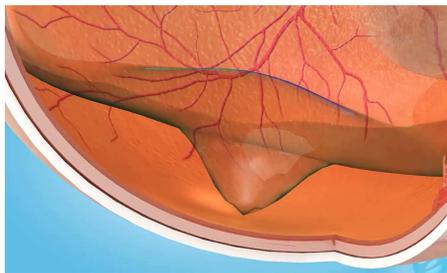


VITREOUS DETACHMENT

Q What is vitreous detachment?

A A posterior vitreous detachment (PVD) occurs when the jelly that fills the eye shrinks and pulls away from the retina at the back of the eye, to which it is loosely attached. As this happens, flashes of light are often seen out of the corner of your eye and little black dots known as floaters often appear.



Q What causes posterior vitreous detachment?

A The eye is filled with a jelly-like substance called the vitreous humour. Throughout life the vitreous tends to liquefy and shrink and as it does so it pulls slightly on the points where it is loosely attached to the inside of the eye. When this happens, flashes of light are sometimes seen out of the corner of your eye and in some cases, cells break off from the retina and enter the vitreous, causing a sudden increase in the number of floaters. This is known as a posterior vitreous detachment and it can happen at any age but is most common among people between the age of 40 and 60. A PVD on its own is not serious.

Q Can it have complications?

A In some cases the retina can tear as the vitreous breaks away and this can lead to a 'retinal detachment'.

A retinal detachment occurs when any part of the retina, the eye's light-sensitive tissue, is lifted or pulled from its normal position on the back wall of the eye. A retinal detachment is a serious condition and should always be considered an emergency. If left untreated, it can lead to permanent visual impairment within two or three days or even blindness in the eye.



Those who experience a sudden increase in posterior vitreous detachment, flashes of light in peripheral vision, or a loss of peripheral vision should have an eye care professional examine their eyes as soon as possible.

Q What should I do if I think that I have PVD?

A In most cases a posterior vitreous detachment does not cause any significant problems apart from a few floaters. However, in view of the risk of a retinal tear or detachment, if you have experienced flashing lights and a sudden increase in the number of floaters, you should have an eye examination as soon as possible. If you notice that you cannot see out of any part of your eye, you should go straight to a hospital eye department.