

RETINA CONSULTANTS OF WESTERN NEW YORK

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FLOATERS AND FLASHING LIGHTS

What Is It?

- The globe (eyeball) is shaped like a camera in that there is a lens and a film. The film is called retina in the human eye.
- The space in between the lens and the film is occupied by a clear jelly-like substance called the vitreous.
- Over time, the vitreous pulls away from the retina in a process called **vitreous detachment**.
- The vitreous also breaks down into small pieces called **floaters**.
- Floaters can take on any sizes and shapes ranging from small dots to wisps to cobwebs.
- Vitreous is attached to the retina and it pulls on the retina as it moves away from it.
- Pulling sensation on the retina is interpreted by the brain as **flashes of lightning called photopsia**. These can be more intense in the dark.
- The constant pulling can cause a tear in the retina over time leading to a retinal tear. A retinal tear is treated by applying laser which will weld the retina around the tear.
- Floaters and flashing lights will not be reduced with the laser but they will lessen over time.
- Retinal tear can spread and become a retinal detachment which can cause severe vision loss and may require surgery.
- The laser treatment will help to lessen the chances of further spread into a retinal detachment but will not completely prevent it.
- Just because there is no evidence of a retinal tear/detachment, it does not mean that it may not occur in the future. Any activities that jar the head can exacerbate the possibility of a retinal tear or detachment.

ANALOGY

- Think of the eyeball as a snow globe. The more that you shake the globe, the more that the snowflakes will move around. When you set it down, the snowflakes will settle down.
- Therefore, try to keep the eye stable when you are having these symptoms to minimize the chances of developing a retinal tear.

Monitoring

- Keep an eye out for certain symptoms including: worsening floaters and flashing lights or seeing a curtain that comes across or up/down and does not move.
- If any of the symptoms are seen, then please call us as soon as possible.
- Any activity that jars the head can potentially exacerbate pulling on the retina. Use caution in daily activities and avoid activities that can shake the head or body.