


OBSERVATORY

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Posterior Vitreous Detachment

Posterior Vitreous Detachment (PVD) is a common condition which occurs in about 75 per cent of people over the age of 65. It can however occur earlier especially if you are shortsighted or have injured your eye.

The vitreous

The vitreous is a clear jelly-like substance within the eye which takes up the space behind the lens and the retina (the light sensitive layer at the back of the eye). It is attached to the retina, more strongly in some places than others.

Vitreous detachment

This firm jelly-like substance changes with age. The central part of the vitreous becomes more liquid and the outer part (cortex) peels away from the retina. As it comes away from the retina it can cause the symptoms of posterior vitreous detachment.



Symptoms of PVD

Many people are not aware that they have developed PVD but some notice symptoms such as floaters or flashing lights. Floaters can take many forms from little dots, circles, lines, to clouds or cobwebs. The flashing lights that occur are also caused by the PVD. As the outer part of the vitreous detaches from the retina it can pull on this light sensitive membrane. The pull of the vitreous on the retina causes the sensation of flashing lights since the brain interprets all stimulation signals from the retina as light.

Treatment for PVD

Unfortunately at the moment nothing can be done medically for this condition, usually people find that the symptoms calm down after about six months as the brain tends to adapt to the floaters and eventually is able to ignore them.

Long term

The only threat to vision is the small chance of a retinal tear (which may lead to a detachment). It is important to stress that retinal tears and detachments are much rarer conditions and that very few people with PVD go on to develop either of these problems.

Retinal tears

Sometimes the vitreous is so firmly attached to the surface of the retina that as the jelly collapses it pulls too strongly on the retina causing it to tear (which in turn may lead to a detachment) Warning signs of a retinal tear or detachment could be an increase in size and number of your floaters, a change/increase in the flashing lights you experience or a blurring of vision. **If you experience any of these symptoms you should seek medical advice within 24 hours.** This is particularly important if you notice a dark "curtain" falling across your vision, as this may mean that the retina has already partially detached. **Early intervention** may allow treatment of a tear before it becomes a detachment and increase the chances of a good recovery from a retinal detachment which has already occurred.

