

Elderly people's eye problem

People sometimes see dots, lines or cobweb-like shadows. This is a common occurrence called "floaters" which is exaggerated by eye movement. Sometimes they see bright flashes of light – another common occurrence, called "flashes."

This often happens as they get old and the gel that's in the space between the lens of their eye and the retina lining at the back of the eye turns watery, a condition called "posterior vitreous detachment". Holes or tears develop in about 15 per cent of such cases.

Without prompt medical attention this condition can advance to a stage called "retinal detachment" which can lead to diminished eyesight, even permanent blindness. Other signs of retinal detachment include blurred vision, sudden sharp fall in vision or distorted vision.

There are different ways to treat retinal detachment. They include a method called freezing therapy (cryotherapy), laser photocoagulation, scleral buckle surgery and an operation to remove the vitreous gel, called vitrectomy.

The aim of these operations is to close the holes in the retina. Up to 90 per cent of retinal detachment cases need no more than one operation. A second operation is rarely needed.

People with a family history of retinal detachment, or who had suffered an eye injury, or are severely shortsighted or had undergone a cataract operation are more susceptible to retinal detachment.

People are advised to see an eye doctor if they experience a sudden, sharp increase in floaters or flashes.