Patient information: accident and emergency

Information for patients with flashes and floaters

Flashes of light or black floaters that look like spiders or tadpoles are quite commonly seen by people with normal eyes. They occur because of changes in the vitreous jelly, which lies directly in front of the retina. Any changes in the vitreous jelly can give rise to the appearance of floaters but does not usually lead to any serious problems. No treatment is therefore necessary.

Separation or detachment of the vitreous from the retina is a common phenomenon, particularly in people over 50 years of age. In 90% of patients this is an entirely harmless change with no damage to the retina. Vitreous detachment is a once in a lifetime event and the vitreous cannot be reattached. Often, the floaters will persist but become less noticeable with time.

Flashes and floaters usually remain the same or get better. If they are troublesome, the effect of floaters may be minimized by wearing dark glasses. This will especially help in bright sunlight or when looking at a brightly lit surface.

When you were examined today, there was no sign of any damage to your eye and no treatment was considered necessary. You do not need to worry, but if the flashes or floaters become worse you should attend the A&E department to make sure there aren’t any serious problems.

If you see a black shadow or curtain effect, or you suddenly lose vision please attend the A&E department without delay.

This information can be made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print on request. Please call PALS: 020 7566 2324/ 020 7566 2325
Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)
Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325
Email: moorfields.pals@nhs.net
Moorfields’ PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks
Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further – see above for contact details. For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, please visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs.