Flashes and Floaters

There are many causes of flashes (bursts of light that aren’t actually occurring around you) and floaters (dark to light colored objects that “float” in your sight). Though very disturbing and unsettling to patients when they first appear, the most common cause of these symptoms is not serious.

Eye Anatomy:
The Posterior (rear) chamber of the eye is filled with a dense gel called the vitreous. This gel breaks down and liquefies throughout our life. If sufficient “wrinkles” and “bubbles” develop these “defects” cast shadows on the retina (back of the eye) causing the “spots” that we see in our vision. They are most noticeable when someone is looking at a bright background such as a computer screen or the sky. If a greater portion of the vitreous liquefies, the whole gel separates from the back of the eye and settles to the lower part of the eye. This event often causes a very large floater. The gentle tugging of the vitreous gel as it separates from the wall of the eye stimulates the retina and causes flashes to be seen. This whole process of separation can take weeks to months to complete.

Treatment:
There is no treatment for a vitreous detachment as described above. The progress of the detachment is often monitored with dilated exams to assure no complications develop.

Complications:
If the vitreous gel fails to completely detach from the retina, a retinal hole or detachment can occur. This is a more serious condition that requires immediate attention as it can lead to permanent vision loss. Retinal tears and detachments often cause:

* A sudden shower of floaters (looking like a swarm of bugs)
* A curtain over the eye
* Flashes that come in quick succession with little breaks between episodes.

This type of complication requires immediate surgery to preserve vision.

Retinal holes and tears can also occur spontaneously without a preceding Vitreous Detachment.

Risks Increase With:
* Age
* Preexisting Retinal thinning
* High Nearsightedness
* History of Eye Trauma
* Diabetes

Other Conditions Causing Similar Symptoms:
Uveitis (an internal inflammation of the eye)
Foreign Body in the eye
Ocular Migraines
Pregnancy
Sudden Eye Movements

The UHC Vision Clinic is available to students, student’s spouses/partners, faculty/staff, and dependents. It offers the full range of optometric care as well as a large retail inventory of frames and lenses.

Appointments are necessary and can be made online (students) or by phone. Call 706-542-5617 or visit http://www.uhs.uga.edu/services/vision_clinic.html