



Ythan Opticians

Professional Eye Care

Posterior Vitreous Detachment

What is 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. As people get older the vitreous, a jelly-like substance inside the eye changes. This can cause Posterior Vitreous Detachment.

The vitreous is a clear jelly-like substance within the eye which takes up the space behind the lens and in front of the retina, the light sensitive layer at the back of the eye and is 99 per cent water. The other 1 per cent consists of substances which are important in maintaining the shape of the vitreous. The outer part of the vitreous (the cortex) has the highest concentration of collagen. The vitreous is attached to the retina, more strongly in some places than others. When a PVD starts the jelly comes away from the retina.

The firm jelly-like substance of the vitreous 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

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, especially where the vitreous is attached quite strongly to the retina. The pull of the vitreous in these areas stimulates the retina. This stimulation causes the sensation of flashing lights since the brain interprets all stimulation signals from the retina as light.

Treatment

Unfortunately at the moment nothing can be done medically for this condition, usually people find that the symptoms calm down after about six months and people do eventually get used to living with the floaters. The brain tends to adapt to the floaters and eventually is able to ignore them, so they then only become a problem in very bright light.

PVD does not in itself cause any permanent loss of vision. There may be some difficulties with because of the floaters and flashing lights though these do not cause permanent sight loss.

The only threat to vision is the small chance of a retinal tear leading to a retinal 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. However any new symptoms of flashing lights or floater should be investigated by your optometrist.