



Thomas P. Finley, OD

Dr. Finley received his Bachelor of Science degree from St. Francis College in Pennsylvania, and his Doctorate of Optometry from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry. Following graduation, he served as an optometrist in the U.S. Air Force and was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal and the Commendation Medal.

Dr. Finley has served as an adjunct clinical professor for three optometry schools and has been a clinical investigator for two major contact lens companies. He has published several articles in professional and trade journals and local newspapers, as well as lectured at many conferences throughout the area.

Dr. Finley is a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, a Fellow of the Virginia Academy of Optometry, and a member of the American Optometric Association, Virginia Optometric Association, Northern Virginia Optometric Society, and Armed Forces Optometric Society. He is an Advisory Board member for TLC Laser Eye Centers, and area Administrator for Vision Source, a national network of independent optometrists.

Locally, Dr. Finley serves as an active member of the Herndon Rotary Club (past president), Chamber of Commerce (past board member), Optimist Club (youth sports coach), Knights of Columbus (past board member), and current board member for the Jeannie Schmidt Free Clinic. He was awarded Herndon's "Distinguished Service Award," the Chamber of Commerce's "Small Business of the Year Award," and *The Times* Newspaper's "Best Eye Doctor Award." He has owned his practice in Herndon since 1989.

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Eye Floaters and Spots in Your Vision

By Thomas P. Finley, OD

A lot of my patients complain about seeing black spots floating in their vision from time to time. Or they report, "I have gnats around my eyes and see cobwebs." These spots are called vitreal floaters, and are usually completely normal.

Inside the eye is a clear jello-like material called the vitreous. It is made up of microscopic fibers and has a gel consistency. As we become older (even in our teens), the consistency of the gel begins to change. Some liquefies, and some solidifies. The end result is your eye will have tiny particles or strands trapped in the vitreous gel.

When a bright light enters your eye, it hits these larger strands and particles, and casts a shadow on your retina. So what you're noticing is actually a shadow of a particle, and not the particle itself. The particle is always there, but you'll only notice it if there is a lot of light entering your eye, and you're looking at a light colored background. Most people notice these floaters when they're driving down the road on a bright sunny day, and see the spots projected against a clear sky, or when reading a book or viewing a

computer monitor. Other people notice them in the morning projected against a light colored bedroom ceiling when the sun enters their room.

The floaters are always there. You just don't notice them all of the time. Since the particles are trapped inside the gel in your eyes, they will move as you move your eye. That's why they jump away when you turn your eye to look at them.

"Most spots and eye floaters are merely annoying and harmless when they temporarily enter the field of vision. They may also fade over time or gravitate out of your vision."

Unfortunately, the size and number of the floaters tends to increase as we become older. They are usually not serious, but can be very annoying. Floaters could also be an indicator that something is changing in the back of your eye, especially if there is a sudden increase in their size and number. A comprehensive eye examination with eye drops to make your pupils larger is the only way to make certain your floaters are a normal change, and

not the sign of a more serious sight threatening problem, like a retinal tear or detachment.

Most spots and eye floaters are merely annoying and harmless when they temporarily enter the field of vision. They may also fade over time or gravitate out of your vision. Surgery to remove and replace the vitreal gel may eliminate floaters, but most surgeons will only do this in conjunction with other eye surgery, like cataract removal.

Occasionally, flashes or streaks of light may appear in your vision. This occurs as the vitreal gel shrinks and pulls on the retina inside your eye. The retinal cells are stimulated to "fire" by this tugging action and cause the perception of light flashes.

Vitreous shrinkage continues as we age. Eventually, the vitreous pulls completely away from the retina. The symptoms of a vitreal detachment are very similar to a more serious retinal detachment. A thorough examination of the back of your eyes must be performed to determine the cause of your symptoms.

Vitreal floaters are usually a normal occurrence that affects us all. Make certain you inform your eye doctor about them so your eyes remain healthy and free of disease.



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