Floaters

Floaters can be described as semi-transparent specks or cobwebs, threads, black dots or spots which may appear to 'swim' or shift in location when changing position of your gaze.

“I see black dots & cobwebs in front of my eyes, Is this normal?”
What are floaters and what causes them?

Some floaters are natural material ‘floating’ in the vitreous, which is a gel-like material, hence the floaters can move when your gaze is shifted. Floaters are natural materials, left over ‘debris’ from the embryonic eye developing or injury. They are usually noticed when looking against a plain or bright background. The more long standing and common causes of floaters are associated posterior vitreous detachment or PVD, or vitreous condensation/debris. Clumps can form when the vitreous gel begins to shrink or liquify and then detaches from the retina. Floaters can also be associated with uveitis, vitreous haemorrhage, myopia/short sightedness and cataract surgery. Less commonly, floaters can be associated with retinal detachment or corneal opacity. Light flashes or photopsia can occur when the retina gets tugged, pulled, torn or detached.

Should I be worried if I have floaters?

While annoying, most floaters are not cause for alarm, however, all floaters should be assessed in a full examination with an optometrist. Usually they are associated with vitreous detachment; however it is important to rule out more serious conditions. The eye assessment will involve dilating the pupil to carefully assess the floaters and the health of the eye.

When is immediate attention required?

If there is a sudden appearance of a significant number of floaters, especially if they are accompanied by flashes of light or other vision disturbances such as blurred vision, this could indicate a detached retina or other serious problem in the eye. A retinal detachment or tear is an emergency, requiring immediate attention. If you sudden see floaters or flashes, see your Optometrist without delay.