dark (e.g. turning the light out or walking from one room to another at night). This is a naturally occurring or 'entoptic' phenomenon.

Secondly, in **migraine** there may be shimmering lights in a zig-zag pattern but these last for about 10 minutes. There may also be a headache and other symptoms but not always.

Thirdly, during and **after cataract surgery** people routinely experience a variety of flashes and can often see pre-existing floaters more easily. A posterior vitreous detachment makes cataract surgery slightly safer.

How common is a vitreous detachment?

It occurs in about the same percentage as a person's age: 20% of 20 year olds, 50% 50 year olds, 80% 80 year olds.

What does the vitreous do in the eye?

When you were an embryo in your mother's womb it provided a pathway for blood vessels that formed the front of the eye. These structures were invisible when stretched out but become visible as' floaters' when vitreous shifting folded them up.

If you would like to be seen by ACES please talk to your GP or Optometrist.

For more information contact us on
> 01945 466222

Or ACES
The North Cambs Hospital
The Park
Wisbech
PE13 3AB

Or www.aces-eyeclinic.co.uk

ACES is regulated by the Care Quality Commission. Our information file, including our statement of purpose, can be found in the patient waiting area. Disabled access is available.

CQC can be contacted on **03000 616161 or** enquires@cqc.org.uk
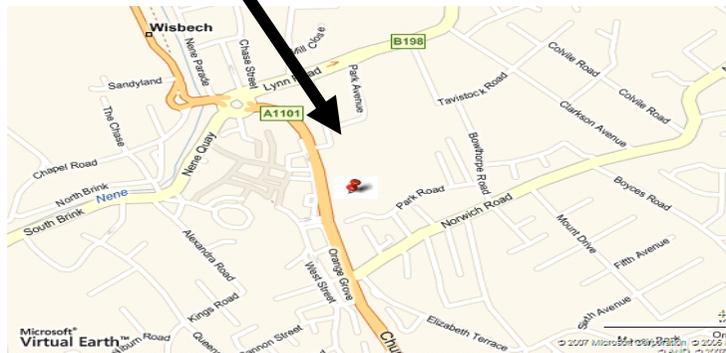www.cqc.org.uk
Finsbury Tower
103-105 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8TG

If you have any concerns, comments or compliments about the information in this leaflet or about your treatment with ACES, please contact:
> 01945 466222

and ask to speak to the Registered Manager.
North Cambs Hospital

NHS

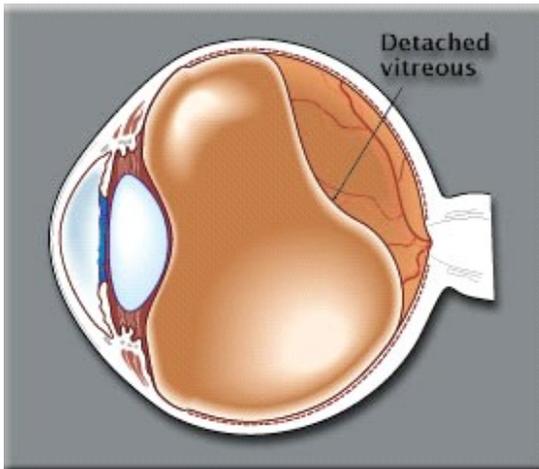*Anglia Community Eye Service*

Floaters

Patient Information Leaflet

Floaters

What are floaters?

Floaters are small specks which move across your field of vision. They are more noticeable against a bright background such as a blue sky.

They are thickened clumps in the vitreous gel that fills the cavity of the eye. They may look like they are in front of the eye but they are floating inside it. They move with a slight delay causing visible shadows to be cast upon the retina.

What causes floaters?

The vitreous gel that fills the eye is set like a solid jelly when you are a child but it 'melts' as you get older and 'sloshes' about when the eye moves. This can lead to the whole vitreous gel being separated from the retina by fluid. This called **posterior vitreous detachment/ separation.**

What should I look out for?

If any of the following three symptoms occur you should seek immediate care:

- **Floaters** (sudden onset of *new* floaters)

- **Flashes** (*new* flashes in your visual field)

- **Field of vision** (You should *check your peripheral vision daily* and report if you become able to see so around the edges whilst looking straight ahead)

The most serious symptom is loss of side vision as this could herald a retinal detachment. Retinal detachment needs attention within one day so that it may be treated and vision loss prevented.

Are there any treatments?

Most floaters are harmless and fade over time because as the floater drifts away from the retina, the shadow it casts becomes lighter. At ACES we carefully examine your peripheral retina for breaks in the retina that might need treatment in order to prevent retinal detachment.

There is no safe and guaranteed way to get rid of floaters. The risks of surgical removal by vitrectomy are considered by many to outweigh benefits. Laser treatment has been tried but is not always effective.

Are floaters and flashing lights always due to posterior vitreous separation?

No.

Floaters may be due to inflammation if you have uveitis or blood if you have diabetes for example. Help should be sought in the same way.

Flashing lights are common in a few other settings which can get confused:
Firstly, it is perfectly normal to experience a momentary flash in the outer field of vision when the lighting changes suddenly. Commonly this might be going from light to