

# Mr Anthony G Tyers

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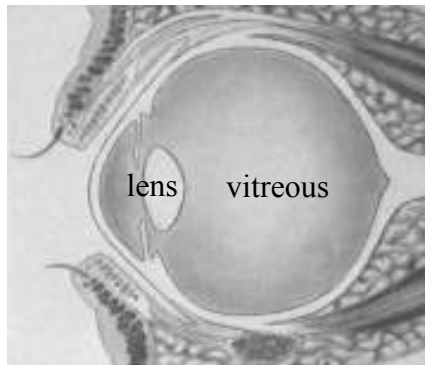
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## FLOATERS

### **Q** *What are floaters?*

**A** Behind the lens, the eye is filled with a gel called 'vitreous'. The vitreous is normally completely clear and invisible to the eye. However, if any opacities appear within the vitreous they cast a shadow which can be seen as black dots or lines. These are floaters. They can be seen to swirl around in the vision with movements of the eyes.



### **Q** *What causes floaters?*

**A** Floaters occur commonly in normal eyes as we get older. Most short sighted people are aware of floaters and they occur in many others without indicating any disease of the eyes. They may gradually increase with age and usually cause no more than minor inconvenience.

Certain diseases also cause floaters. The *sudden* appearance of a cloud of small floaters may indicate a haemorrhage into the vitreous. This could be caused by a tear in the retina. Larger floaters appearing suddenly may be caused by a change in the vitreous itself (see the Information Sheet, 'Posterior Vitreous Detachment'). Some inflammations inside the eye cause floaters that gradually increase over several days.

### **Q** *What should I do if I experience floaters?*

**A** Whatever the cause, floaters, especially if they appear suddenly, should be investigated promptly. Your doctor will refer you to the local hospital eye department.

### **Q** *Will the floaters disappear?*

**A** If the floaters are due to haemorrhage or inflammation in the vitreous you can expect them to improve slowly over several weeks. Larger haemorrhages can take several months to disappear and the vision may be poor during this time. Floaters associated with short sightedness or a posterior vitreous detachment do not disappear.

**Q** *Can anything be done to treat floaters if they are blocking vision?*

**A** The vitreous can be removed (together with the floaters) in an operation called 'vitrectomy'. However, this procedure is accompanied by several side effects and it is usually reserved for specific diseases within the eye. If the floaters are very dense and causing serious loss of vision a vitrectomy may be considered.

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