

Plaza Del Rio Eye Clinic, P.C.

Retinal Detachment

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What is retinal detachment?

The retina is a thin membrane of nerve tissue that lines the back of the eye. When part or all of the retina comes off (detaches from) the back of the eye, it is called retinal detachment.

The nerve cells in the retina normally detect light entering the eye and send signals to the brain about what the eye sees. But when the retina detaches, it no longer works correctly. It can cause blurred and lost vision. Retinal detachment requires immediate medical care. If done soon enough, surgery can save lost vision.

What causes retinal detachment?

Retinal detachment often begins when the vitreous gel, a thick gel that fills the center of the eye, shrinks and separates from the retina. Called a posterior vitreous detachment (PVD), this is a normal part of aging and can be harmless. Sometimes, though, PVD can tear the retina. This happens where the vitreous gel is strongly attached to the retina. As the vitreous gel shrinks, it pulls so hard that the retina tears. The tear allows fluid to collect under the retina and may cause the retina to detach.

Other things that can lead to retinal detachment are an eye or head injury, high myopia or near-sightedness, eye disease, and conditions such as diabetes.

Unfortunately, most cases of retinal detachment cannot be prevented. But seeing your eye doctor regularly, wearing protective goggles or eyeglasses, and treating diabetes may help protect your vision.

What are the symptoms?

Many people have symptoms of a posterior vitreous detachment, or PVD, before they have symptoms of retinal detachment. When the vitreous gel shrinks and separates from the retina, it causes floaters and flashes. Floaters are spots, specks, and lines that float through your field of vision. Flashes are brief sparkles or lightning streaks that are most easily seen when your eyes are closed. They often appear at the edges of your visual field. Floaters and flashes do not always mean that you will have a retinal detachment. But they may be a warning sign, so it is best to be checked by a doctor.

Sometimes a retinal detachment happens without warning. The first sign of detachment may be a shadow across part of your vision that does not go away. Or you may have new and sudden loss of side (peripheral) vision that gets worse over time.

How is retinal detachment diagnosed?

To diagnose retinal detachment, your doctor will examine your eyes and ask you questions about any symptoms you have.

If you have symptoms of retinal detachment, your doctor will use a lighted magnifying tool called an ophthalmoscope to examine your retina. With this tool, your doctor can see holes, tears, or retinal detachment.