

# From frequent floaters to total blindness

Blocked peripheral vision or seeing flashes of light may be early signs of retinal detachment, says senior consultant ophthalmologist Dr Paul Zhao



The earlier retinal detachment is diagnosed, the higher the chances of preserving vision. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

If you are over the age of 40, your risk of retinal detachment has just increased. A serious condition, retinal detachment needs to be treated promptly or it could result in blindness within days or weeks, says Dr Paul Zhao, senior consultant ophthalmologist from Mount Alvernia Hospital. However, if detected early, the patient's vision can be saved. Here, Dr Zhao shares prevention and treatment options.

## Q What are some of the causes of retinal detachment?

The retina is attached to and covers the entire back surface of the eye. It functions like the film of a camera to detect images and transmit it to the brain. A retinal detachment is where the retina separates from the wall of the eye, resulting in a loss of vision.

Retinal detachment is most commonly caused by a tear in the retina, allowing fluid in the eye to enter and go under the retina, lifting it off the eyewall.

A retinal tear could be from trauma to the eye or excessive eye rubbing. It can also occur as one ages. People with high myopia tend to have areas of thinning in their retina which increases their risk of a retinal detachment.

## Q How will you know if your retina has detached?

While the occasional floater is of no concern, experiencing a sudden increase in floaters, along with blurring of vision may be a sign of retinal detachment.

Your peripheral vision may also be blocked. This blockage may start in the upper or lower part of your vision or from the sides, depending on the area of the retina that is detached. If left untreated, it will progress towards the centre over a short period of time. In some cases, this can happen in as soon as one to two days.

## Q What are the treatment options and how long would the procedure take?

The main treatment option is surgery, of which there are three types:

- Vitrectomy involves removing the vitreous gel within the eye and replacing it temporarily with a gas that serves to flatten the detached retina
- Scleral buckling surgery, where a silicone band is placed around the eye
- Pneumatic retinopexy, where a gas bubble is directly injected into the eye, followed by laser treatment to the retina break.

The procedures are usually done within a day. Generally, it would be at least three to four weeks before the patient can return to work. Strenuous exercises should also be avoided for the first two to three months after surgery.

## Q How can one protect their eyes from retinal detachment?

Avoid rubbing your eyes and wear eye protection if you play contact sports to minimise the risk of trauma to your eyes.

Also watch out for the warning signs of a retinal tear such as sudden increase of floaters and flashes of light. If detected early, a retinal tear is easily treated with a simple laser procedure which can prevent it from progressing to a retinal detachment.



**Dr Paul Zhao**

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