

# Eye floaters and flashes of light linked to retinal tear, detachment

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Queen's University Ophthalmology professor Sanjay Sharma leads a team investigating sudden-onset flashes and floaters. Credit: Insidermedicine

Suddenly seeing floaters or flashes of light may indicate a serious eye problem that - if untreated - could lead to blindness, a new study shows.

Researchers from Queen's University and Hotel Dieu Hospital in Kingston have discovered that one in seven patients with this symptom will have a retinal tear or detachment.

"If we detect a tear and laser it, we can save people from potentially going blind," says senior author of the study Dr. Sanjay Sharma, a professor of Ophthalmology and Epidemiology at Queen's and head of the Unit for Cost-Effective Ocular Health Policy at HDH. "But if fluid gets in under the [retina](#) and causes it to detach, it may be too late."

Because retinal tears can be extremely difficult to see, high-tech equipment and a thorough peripheral retinal examination are required to detect them, he adds.

The research, to be published online Tuesday Nov. 24 in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#), is partially funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

To perform their study, the team analyzed nearly 200 articles published in the peer-reviewed literature. They then performed a meta-analysis of 17 articles, and noted that a retinal tear occurred in 14 per cent of the cases of new onset floaters associated with an age-related change in the eye's jelly.

"If new floaters are associated with visual loss, a defect in the visual field, or the presence of blood or 'tobacco dust' in the eye jelly, the risk of retinal tear is significantly higher," says Dr. Sharma. "Since retinal tear can lead to detachment in up to 50 per cent of cases, new floaters and flashes is a medical condition that needs urgent assessment."

Source: Queen's University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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