

YOUR HEALTH CAN CHANGE IN A BLINK

As humans age, they develop vision issues that affect how they see the world despite the use of glasses or contacts. According to Vitale, Cotch, & Sperduto, 14 million individuals 12 and older were estimated to have some type of visual impairment. The Vision Impact Institute's research found that three out of four people in the U.S. need visual correction by use of glasses at seventy-one percent and by contact lenses at twenty-two percent.

I am one of those who needs glasses to see, but they did not help with my most recent visual issue. This past summer, I thought I was having a retinal detachment. I was driving home from work, and I began to have problems with my vision. I noticed squiggly floaters with flashes of light and a reduced peripheral vision that was slightly blurry, but only in my left eye. I began to panic at first, but knew I needed to calm down because I was driving in 5 p.m. traffic. I immediately pulled my vehicle over on the side of the road to avoid an accident.

Being a nurse with an advanced practice degree and an analytical way of thinking, I began to go over a checklist of diagnoses related to ophthalmic

health that could be the most likely cause of what I was experiencing. The one medical condition that stuck out was retinal detachment. Remembering my clinical knowledge of a retinal detachment, I knew this would be a critical situation and I needed to be evaluated as soon as possible. So I called my eye care provider and scheduled an appointment. Luckily, they were able to see me that day.

After being evaluated, I found out that I was not suffering from a retinal detachment but most likely a migraine. I had migraines in the past, but my symptoms were different this time. Needless to say, my optometrist and I were both elated that it was not a retinal detachment.

A retinal detachment is a serious medical emergency. It is a condition where the retina, the layer of tissue located at the back of the eye near the optic nerve, becomes detached from where it is normally. The retina is sensitive to light, and it also converts rays of light into images to your brain through your optic nerve. Symptoms of a retinal detachment include sudden floaters, flashes of light, blurred vision, reduced peripheral vision, and a shadow over your visual field.

Migraines are a multifactorial concern, with symptoms that can vary significantly and progress through stages including prodrome, aura, attack, and postdrome. The stage I was in was the aura. In this stage, a person can experience some or all of the following symptoms: seeing shapes, flashes of light, vision loss, neurologic sensations in the arm or leg, trouble speaking, hearing different noises, or experiencing uncontrollable movements.

While both conditions are treatable, it's important to remember that a retinal detachment is an urgent situation in order to avoid permanent damage to your vision. It is important to know the signs and symptoms of both conditions to preserve the way you see the world around you.

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