

Cotton-Wool Spots

Cotton-wool spots are tiny white areas on the retina, the layer of light-sensing cells lining the back of the eye. Caused by lack of blood flow to the small retinal blood vessels, they usually disappear without treatment and do not threaten vision. They can, however, be an indication of a serious medical condition.

Diabetes is the most common cause of cotton-wool spots. The presence of more than eight cotton-wool spots has been associated with a higher risk of the more severe form of diabetic retinopathy known as proliferative diabetic retinopathy.

Cotton-wool spots are also a common sign of infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). They are present in more than half of the people with full-blown AIDS. Their presence can be an important sign of the severity of HIV-related disease.