

Pterygium

What is a Pterygium

A pterygium is a wedge-shaped growth of thickened tissue that slowly, can grow over the cornea. It may grow large enough to interfere with the vision. Pterygia usually grow in the inner corner of the eye, and can affect one or both eyes.

A pterygium is not a cancer, and will not develop into a cancer. They are also fairly slow growing.

A pinguecula is a similar type of growth. It is usually a soft yellow mass which is confined to the white of the eye.



What causes a pterygium?

The causes of these lesions are not completely understood; however prolonged exposure to sunlight, especially ultra-violet (UV) rays seems to play an important role. Other environmental irritants such as dust and wind can also be implicated. People who spend considerable time outdoors for work reasons or recreation are more likely to develop pterygia.

A dry eye may also contribute to a pterygium.

How is pterygium treated?

A conservative approach to treatment is recommended for most people. Artificial tears can be used to relieve the irritation and foreign body feeling in the eye. Occasionally, if the lesion becomes inflamed a mild decongestant or an anti-inflammatory drop may be required.

Surgery is the only way to remove a pterygium, a small percentage will grow back. To help prevent the recurrence of the pterygium, a graft of healthy tissue to the surgical site is used.

Indication for surgery.

Surgery is not recommended unless a pterygium or pinguecula is causing significant problems such as

- Threat to normal vision - growing substantially over the cornea and toward the pupil and physically obstructing vision.
- Astigmatism caused by the distortion of the cornea as it grows across it.
- Persistent and excessive discomfort due to dryness or foreign body feeling.
- Pterygium may be unsightly, and cosmetically unacceptable to the patient.

SURGERY

Most cases of pterygium bad enough to bring to a specialist's attention end up requiring operation. The procedure takes about 45 minutes, and requires a hospital day stay and the use of the operating microscope. Local anaesthetic is used, and the procedure is considered by nearly all patients to be no worse than, say, a dental procedure.

After the procedure you will need to use drops for about 6 weeks and attend the office 2-3 times during this time.

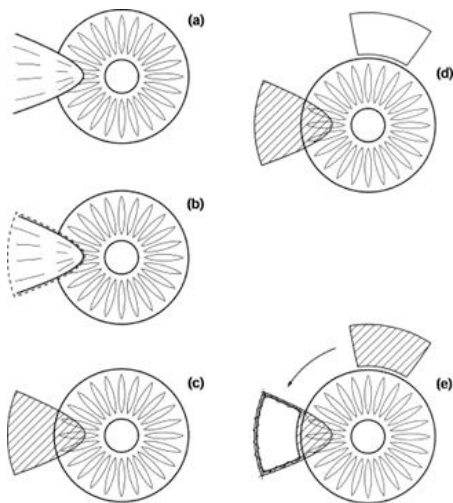
It takes about 6 weeks for the eye to settle after pterygium surgery and most patients want to be off work for 4-5 days, as the eye may be quite sore early on. The spectacle prescription can sometimes change slightly as a result of pterygium surgery.

RECURRENCE

Over half of operated pterygia will tend to grow back after simple surgical removal. A technique to lower this recurrence rate to about 5% is Conjunctival Autograft (see below). When the pterygium is removed, your doctor transplants some normal conjunctiva (the transparent "skin" of the white of the eye) that has been unaffected by UV light (eg. the conjunctiva that is normally behind the top lid) onto the surgical area. This normal conjunctiva usually heals normally and does not have the tendency to cause or be associated with a recurrence of pterygium.

Prevention of pterygium and pinguecula.

The best form of treatment is prevention. Wearing UV protective , wrap-around sunglasses when exposed to sunlight and a wide brimmed hat is highly recommended.



- (a) Pterygium
- (b) Pterygium removed
- (c) leaving bare area
- (d) Graft outlined
- (e) Graft sutured into place

Other techniques to lower recurrence rate (eg mitomycin, applications of radiation) may be used in particularly difficult situations, but are not the first choice as they have the possibility to cause severe problems longer-term.

POST-OP INSTRUCTIONS (AFTER SURGERY)

1. Your eye may be very sore for 3-4 days - it may be necessary to take some pain-killers (Panadeine, Nurofen) and a sleeping tablet in the first day or so. Ice packs (frozen peas) give good relief from the soreness in the first day or two.
2. The sutures on the surface of the eye will feel a bit scratchy initially, but this tends to settle down over a day or two.
3. Your eye will be sensitive to light for about one week. Wear sunglasses to protect your eye from glare.
4. Use the eyedrops and ointment as directed by your doctor. The Maxidex is an anti-inflammatory drop and helps to prevent recurrence of the pterygium. It is used on a decreasing dosage regime for about 6 weeks. The Chlorsig drops protects against infection. The frequent lubricant drops are soothing and help prevent recurrence.
5. DO NOT DRIVE while wearing the eye patch.
6. BE CAREFUL with steps and crossing roads while wearing the eye patch.
7. If you are concerned about your eye after the operation, please ring the office Monday to Friday, contact your surgeon on the after hours numbers provided at the time of surgery.