

PTERYGIUM

GROWTHS ON THE EYE FROM SUN DAMAGE

Pterygia and pingueculae are abnormal growths on the surface of the eye. While a pinguecula does not interfere with sight, a pterygium may grow large enough to cause vision problems. Both conditions are most commonly seen in warm, dry climates.

WHAT IS A PTERYGIUM?

A pterygium is a fleshy, wedge shaped growth on the cornea of the eye. This elevated growth of elastic and connective tissue usually begins on the inner corner of the eye and extends toward the center of the eye. A pterygium is the result of an abnormal process in which the conjunctiva (white part of the eye) grows onto the cornea (clear part of the eye).

WHAT CAUSES A PTERYGIUM?

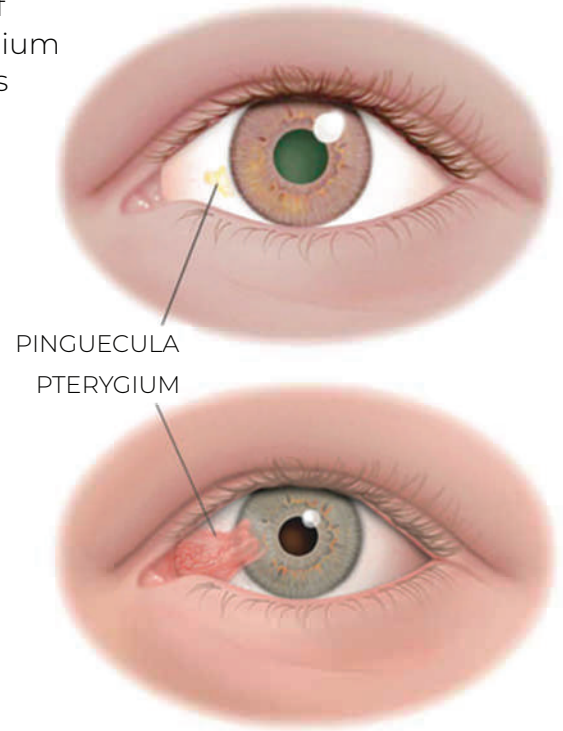
The exact reason pterygia occur is not completely understood. However, long term exposure to ultraviolet sunlight and chronic irritation from dry conditions seem to contribute to their development. Pterygia develop more often in people who spend a great deal of time outdoors and are frequently exposed to sun, wind, dust, or harsh climates.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A PTERYGIUM?

The symptoms of a pterygium are usually not severe but may include blurred vision and eye irritation. Patients often complain of itching, burning, and scratchiness. During periods of growth, the pterygium is swollen and red. Pterygia tend to progress slowly, and, in many patients, they stabilize without causing problems. However, if the pterygium grows over the center of the cornea, vision loss occurs.

HOW IS A PTERYGIUM TREATED?

Pterygia are permanent. If the pterygium becomes red and irritated, lubricating and/or steroid eye drops are used to reduce inflammation and relieve dryness. If vision is threatened, a pterygium can be surgically removed. Surgery can also be performed for cosmetic reasons. However, pterygia have a tendency to return, especially in younger people. In addition, the symptoms of dryness and irritation often persist after removal. Wearing good quality sunglasses to further reduce sun exposure is the primary way to prevent progression of a pterygium.



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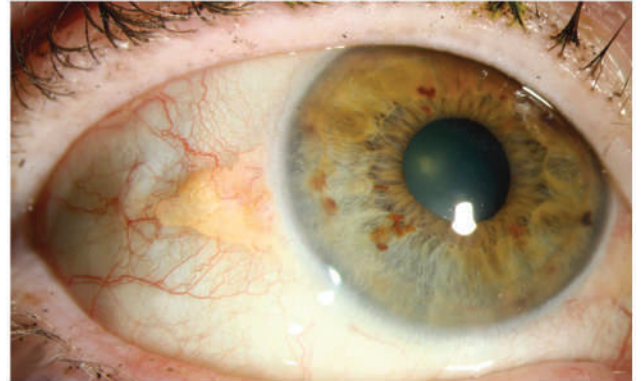
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WHAT IS A PINGUECULA?

A pinguecula is a thickening of the conjunctiva on either side of the eye. The conjunctiva is a thin layer of tissue covering the sclera or white part of the eye. A pinguecula, which appears as a yellowish or white lump, is composed of benign material, such as fat or degenerated tissue. Unlike a pterygium, a pinguecula has not grown onto the cornea and is separated from the cornea by normal tissue.



WHAT CAUSES A PINGUECULA?

Pingueculae are usually caused by dryness and exposure to the environment. Pingueculae occur more frequently in climates which are warm, dusty, and dry. People who work or spend a great deal of time outdoors are more prone to this condition.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A PINGUECULA?

In most people, a pinguecula creates no symptoms. However, burning or stinging of the eye may occur in some cases. Occasionally, a pinguecula may become red and irritated by smoke, dust, or wind. Although the eye may be unpleasant looking, a pinguecula does not interfere with sight.

HOW IS A PINGUECULA TREATED?

Pinguecula are permanent. If the pinguecula becomes inflamed, good quality lubricant eye drops are used to relieve redness and irritation. Although surgical removal is rarely required, a pinguecula may be removed for cosmetic reasons. However, as with a pterygium, the pinguecula frequently returns after removal. Wearing good quality sunglasses to further reduce sun exposure is the primary way to prevent progression of a pinguecula.



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