

## PTERYGIUM AND PINGUECULUM

Pterygium and pingueculum are growths on the surface of the eye, related to UV exposure.



### PTERYGIUM

A pterygium is a raised, wedge-shaped growth that occurs on the surface of the eye. It is thought to be related to increased exposure to ultra-violet (UV) light, as it is more common in people who have lived in sunny areas.

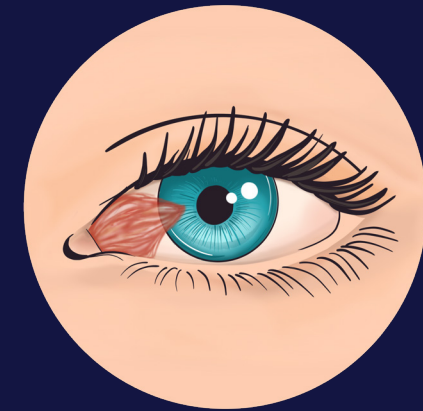
Pterygium starts as an area of redness and thickening on the conjunctiva, usually on the inner aspect of the white of the eye. In some cases, the pterygium may extend across onto the cornea, which is the clear membrane of the eye that covers the iris. If the pterygium is unsightly, uncomfortable, or grows towards the middle of the cornea, it should be surgically removed.

### PINGUECULUM

A pingueculum is a roughly triangular area of creamy or yellowish thickening on the surface of the eye. It is also related to UV exposure, and is very common in the New Zealand population. It usually develops on the white of the eye next to the cornea, either on the inner or outer part of the eye or both. It can become red at times. It does not generally extend across the cornea or affect the vision, although it may occasionally transform into a pterygium.

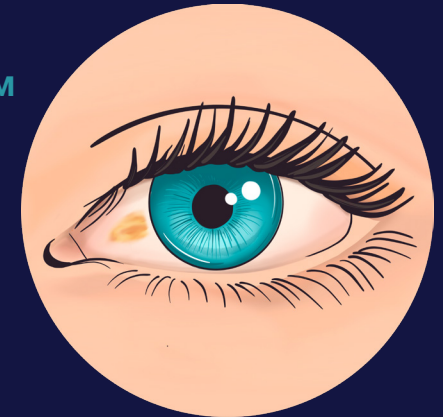
### SYMPTOMS

Either of these lesions may be easily visible and cause cosmetic embarrassment. They often become sore, red, and gritty, especially if exposed to wind, smoke or dust. The pterygium may eventually interfere with the vision, either by distorting the cornea or by extending over the pupil.



PTERYGIUM

PINGUECULUM



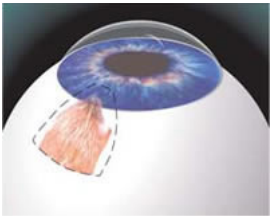
### TREATMENT

The comfort of a pterygium or pingueculum may be improved by using eye drops such as artificial tear drops or decongestant drops. These often help with the redness of the eye as well.

If sight is unaffected and the symptoms are not annoying, pterygia and pinguecula can be safely left alone. Some pterygia and pinguecula which continue to cause problems such as unacceptable appearance, discomfort, or effect on vision, may require surgical removal.

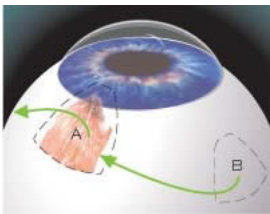
# SURGERY

The surgery is performed under local anaesthetic. There should be no pain during the surgery, which takes approximately 30 minutes.



Eye with pterygium

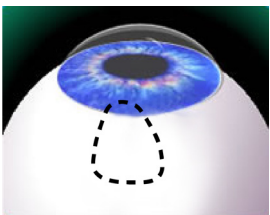
In surgery, the pterygium or pingueculum is removed from the cornea and from the white of the eye.



(A) The pterygium is lifted free of the eye and excised.

(B) A graft of conjunctiva from under the upper eyelid is used to cover the defect

Usually after the lesion has been removed, a small piece of conjunctiva (the thin transparent skin covering the white of the eye) is taken from under the upper lid and placed into this site. This improves the healing process and reduces the chance of the lesion growing back.



Eye free of pterygium with conjunctival graft in place

Tissue glue (Artiss) is used in pterygium and pingueculum procedures today as an alternative to sutures. Using tissue glue to attach the transplanted conjunctiva enables a slightly quicker procedure and may reduce post-operative discomfort and inflammation.

# AFTER SURGERY

Following the procedure, a prescription will be given for eye ointment or eye drops and pain relief tablets. For approximately 1-2 weeks following surgery, it is important to take precautions to avoid getting water, dust or dirt in the eye. The eye may retain some redness or irritation in the month following surgery.

A very large pterygium may affect the vision by distorting or scarring the cornea. The vision may remain affected after removal of the pterygium and further treatment such as surgery or laser to improve the corneal shape may be required.

## WILL THE PTERYGIUM OR PINGUECULUM GROW BACK?

One of the main problems with the removal of a **pterygium** is that re-growth may occur, although with newer surgical techniques this happens in fewer than 5% of cases. The conjunctival graft is carried out mainly because it has been shown to reduce the chances of recurrence. The rate of recurrence is greater if a pterygium has been removed previously and has recurred.

To reduce the risk of recurrence, you should try to reduce exposure to ultra-violet light following surgery by wearing sunglasses or a hat when outdoors.

**Pingueculum** does not usually recur, although UV damage may continue to develop over a lifetime. Occasionally the healing of the conjunctiva where the pingueculum has been removed may result in irregularity, roughness or redness. This usually settles with time.



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