

Pterygium and Pingueculum

What is a Pterygium?

A pterygium is a fleshy growth that invades the cornea (the clear front window of the eye). It is an abnormal process in which the conjunctiva (a membrane that covers the white of the eye) grows into the cornea. A pterygium may be small or grow large enough to interfere with vision and commonly occurs on the inner corner of the eye.

What causes a Pterygium?

The exact cause is not well understood. A pterygium occurs more often in people who spend a great deal of time outdoors, especially in sunny climates. Long-term exposure to sunlight and chronic eye irritation from dry, dusty conditions are the biggest factors in pterygium formation.

How is a Pterygium Treated?

When a pterygium becomes red and irritated, topical eyedrops or ointments may be used to help reduce the inflammation. If the pterygium is large enough to threaten sight, is growing or is unsightly, it can be removed surgically.

Despite proper surgical removal, the pterygium may return, particularly in young people. Surface radiation or medications are sometimes used to help prevent recurrences. Protecting the eyes from excessive ultraviolet light with proper sunglasses and avoiding dry, dusty conditions may also help.

What is a Pingueculum?

A pingueculum is a yellowish patch or bump on the white of the eye, most often on the side closest to the nose. It is not a tumor, but an alteration of normal tissue resulting in a deposit of protein and fat. Unlike a pterygium, a pingueculum does not grow onto the cornea. A pingueculum may also be a response to chronic eye irritation or sunlight.

How is a Pingueculum Treated?

No treatment is necessary unless it becomes inflamed. A pingueculum does not grow onto the cornea or threaten sight. If particularly annoying, a pingueculum may, on rare occasions, be surgically removed, but the post-operative scar may be as cosmetically objectionable as the pingueculum. The best way to prevent the pingueculum from becoming unsightly or growing, is to wear sunglasses with UV protection or lubricate your eyes in dusty, dry environments.