

Pterygium

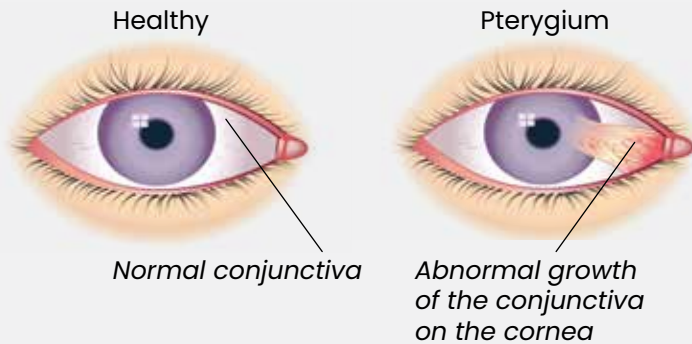
Your guide to pterygium causes, symptoms and treatments.



What is a pterygium?

A pterygium (pronounced teh-ridge-eeum) is an excessive and unpredictable growth of the tissue on the surface of your eye. It happens to about one in 100 Australians and can affect one or both eyes.

Pterygia (plural of pterygium) appear as a pink or red thick line or wedge of growth. Normally this extends across the white part of your eye, the sclera, from the side of your eye closest to your nose. If left untreated, they may continue across the cornea, the part of your eye where light enters and allows vision. This can lead to vision impairment. Despite the overgrowth, pterygia are not cancerous and do not become cancer.



What are symptoms of pterygia?

- Fleshy growth from the corner of the eye
- Mostly painless but can be uncomfortable
- Can be irritated in windy, sunny or dry weather.

Generally, pterygia are painless but they can be irritating and uncomfortable. Some people experience mild pain or itchiness, especially when it is windy or dry. Others may be concerned about the appearance of pterygia, or it may be uncomfortable to wear contact lenses. When the growths extend across the cornea, they can lead to blurred or distorted vision.

What causes pterygia?

We don't know exactly what causes a pterygium to grow, but UV light exposure, windy and dusty environments, dry eyes and genetics are known to increase your risk. Most people who develop pterygia are aged between 20 and 30 years old.

How do we treat pterygia?

The Eye Health Centre can provide specialist advice about your pterygia and the treatment options available.

For many people, pterygia remain stable and don't require intervention. There are several ways you can help reduce the impact to your pterygia.

- Eye lubricants: Artificial lubricants, such as eye drops or ointments, can hydrate and moisturise the surface of your eye. This can help to reduce inflammation and irritation from the pterygia growth.
- Eye protection: Sunglasses or protective eyewear can reduce your eyes' UV exposure, as well as minimising contact with dust and wind. This can minimise irritation to the pterygia.

Why do we treat pterygia?

Some people want their pterygia removed due to their red and inflamed appearance.

Others want them removed because they experience pterygia as uncomfortable. Given their raised, fleshy nature, it can feel like there is something in your eye.

It can also lead to more dry eye complications or infections because the pterygium reduces the ability for the eye's surface to lubricate itself effectively.

For some people, their pterygia will continue to grow across the cornea. When this growth expands across the line of sight, this can reduce or obstruct their vision and cause blurring, shadowing and distortions.

Surgery may be an option for some people for pterygia.

How do we perform pterygium removal surgery?

Pterygium removal surgery is performed under local anaesthetic, so your eye is completely numb during the procedure.

A small cut is made around the pterygium, which is then lifted from the cornea and removed.

We then perform a conjunctival autograft. This involves taking a small part of the eye surface lining (the conjunctiva) from the upper eyelid and attaching it to the area where the pterygium grew.

This method has significantly reduced the previously high rates of pterygia regrowth.

What happens after my pterygium removal surgery?

You will be prescribed antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medications to use on your eye after your surgery. Many people use an eye patch to protect and comfort the eye for the first 24 hours post-surgery.

After your pterygium removal surgery, you can expect your eye to have some bruising and increased discomfort for several weeks. The eye stitches should dissolve within about six weeks, and the white of your eye will return to normal.

During your recovery period, we strongly recommend that you wear sunglasses and protect your eyes from UV light, dust and wind.

All surgery involves risk. We will explain the pterygium removal surgery procedures to you in light of your condition. This surgery requires informed consent.

Once you have recovered from the surgery, most people regain their normal eye function.



Dr Andrew Apel

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Dr Andrew Apel is an ophthalmologist with additional sub-specialty training in corneal and anterior segment surgery. He is an accomplished, highly-esteemed refractive surgeon with more than 25 years' experience. He is a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists.

Pterygium excision with conjunctival autograft is among his key areas of interest.



Dr John Hogden

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Dr John Hogden is an ophthalmologist with sub-specialty training in external eye disease as well as corneal, cataract, anterior segment and refractive surgery. He completed an additional sub-specialty fellowship training program at the University of British Columbia Vancouver Eye Care Centre in Canada.

He is also experienced in pterygium surgery.

Do you have a question or concern about your eye health?

To discuss your condition with an experienced ophthalmologist or optometrist, please contact The Eye Health Centre.



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