

PTERYGIUM & 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, it may grow large enough to interfere with one's vision. The growth commonly occurs on the inner corner of the eye.

What causes a pterygium?

The exact cause of a pterygium is not well understood. Pterygiums occur more often in people who spend a great deal of times outdoors, especially in sunny climates. Long-term exposure sunlight, especially ultra-violet (UV) rays, and chronic eye irritation from dry, dusty conditions seems to play an important casual role.

How is a pterygium treated?

When a pterygium becomes red and irritated, eye drops (both lubrication and medication types) 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 the best and latest surgical techniques, the pterygium may return, particularly in young people. Various techniques using chemotherapy drugs, radiation, or transplanted grafts can 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 the normal tissue resulting in a deposit of protein and fat. Unlike a pterygium, a pingueculum does not actually grow onto the cornea. A pingueculum may also be a response to a chronic eye irritation or sunlight.

How is a pingueculum treated?

No treatment is necessary for a pingueculum, unless it becomes inflamed. A pingueculum does not grow onto cornea or threaten sight. If particularly annoying, a pingueculum may on rare occasions be surgically removed, however, the post operative scar may be as cosmetically objectionable as the pingueculum.