

Frequently asked questions

Are pterygia cancers?

No, although in rare cases surface tumours of the eye may look very similar.

Can pterygia permanently damage my vision?

No, unless they are allowed to grow close to the pupil.

Can pterygia re-grow after surgery?

The chance of regrowth is approximately 1%.

Is pterygium surgery painful?

Not usually, but patients are encouraged to take pain relieving tablets for a few days after surgery. The eye is often watery and sensitive to light for a few days. Sunglasses help keep the eye comfortable.

How do you say pterygium?

It's pronounced ter-ij-ee-um, or the plural is ter-ij-ee-ah.

Need more information?

This brochure can't cover all that is known about pterygia. Please don't hesitate to write down your questions and ask your optometrist or eye surgeon for more information.

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Pterygium



Treatment options for a
common eye condition

What is a pterygium?

A pterygium (plural pterygia) is a fleshy growth on the surface of the eye. They start on the the white of the eye, the sclera, and slowly grow out onto the clear cornea.

They're a type of scar tissue, and in most cases are caused by ultraviolet light.

How common are they?

Pterygia are common in countries like New Zealand, where ultraviolet levels are high, and people spend a lot of time outdoors.

What problems do they cause?

The most common symptoms of pterygia include:

- The look of the eye
- Redness
- Discomfort
- Blurred vision

How is a pterygium diagnosed?

They're often noticed first by friends and family. The diagnosis can be confirmed by your optometrist or general practitioner. Troublesome or unusual cases should be reviewed by an eye specialist.

How is a pterygium treated?

How pterygia are managed depends on what problems they cause.

Self care

You can reduce the likelihood of the pterygium growing and make your eyes more comfortable by:

- Wearing sunglasses and a broad-brimmed hat whenever outside
- Staying indoors when UV levels are high
- Avoiding places where there is smoke, dust or air conditioning
- Using artificial tears to moisturise your eye
- Treating redness and swelling with decongestant eye drops

Medical treatment

Your optometrist, general practitioner or eye surgeon may prescribe steroid or non-steroidal eye drops. These treatments need close supervision.

Surgical treatment.

In a small number of cases your pterygium may need to be removed:

- If the eye looks unsightly
- When the symptoms can't be controlled with eye drops
- If it's threatening your vision
- If there is a risk the growth may not be a pterygium

Pterygium surgery

Surgery to remove a pterygium is usually done as a day stay procedure using local anaesthetic and light sedation.

Once it's been removed, a piece of tissue from beneath your upper eyelid is used to cover the area. This reduces the chances of the pterygium regrowing.

After surgery anti-inflammatory drops keep the eye comfortable and prevent scar tissue from forming.

You'll be able to resume normal activities within a few days.

For more information see www.dr Malcolm Mckellar.co.nz/pt-surgery

