

# Pterygium

Patient information leaflet

## What a pterygium is

A pterygium is a wedge of thickened tissue that grows from the white of the eye onto the clear cornea, usually from the side nearest the nose. It is not a tumour and it is not dangerous. It is also not simply cosmetic: as it advances it pulls on the cornea, distorts its shape and can eventually reach the line of sight.

## Why it develops

Ultraviolet light is the main cause, with wind, dust and dry air contributing. It is therefore common in this region and in people who spend time outdoors.

## What you may notice

- A fleshy, often reddened growth on the surface of the eye
- Redness that worsens in sun, wind or dust
- Grittiness, burning or a feeling of something in the eye
- Blurring, or a new astigmatism as the growth reaches the cornea
- Difficulty wearing contact lenses

## When surgery is advised

Many pterygia stay small and need nothing more than lubricants and sun protection, monitored with photographs. Surgery is advised when it is advancing towards the line of sight, distorting the shape of the cornea, or causing irritation that will not settle. The decision is based on measurements rather than on appearance alone.

## The operation

The abnormal tissue is removed and the bare area is covered with a small graft of your own conjunctiva, taken from beneath the upper lid where it heals without a visible mark. Where suitable the graft is secured with tissue adhesive rather than stitches, which is more comfortable. Simply removing the tissue without a graft carries a high risk of it growing back, which is why this technique is used. The operation takes 30–45 minutes under local anaesthetic.

## After surgery

- The eye feels scratchy, looks red and waters for several days. This is expected.
- Use the drops as prescribed and avoid rubbing the eye.
- Avoid swimming, dust and strenuous activity for two weeks.
- Redness fades gradually over about a month; the white of the eye returns to a natural appearance over several months.
- Wear sunglasses with genuine ultraviolet protection from now on — this reduces the risk of recurrence and of one developing in the other eye.

**Contact the clinic if you develop**

- Increasing pain rather than gradually improving discomfort
- Worsening vision
- Increasing redness with discharge
- A graft that appears to move or lift

*Reviewed by Dr. Aysun Yucel Gencoglu, MD, FEBO, FICO.*

**Notes for you from today's consultation**