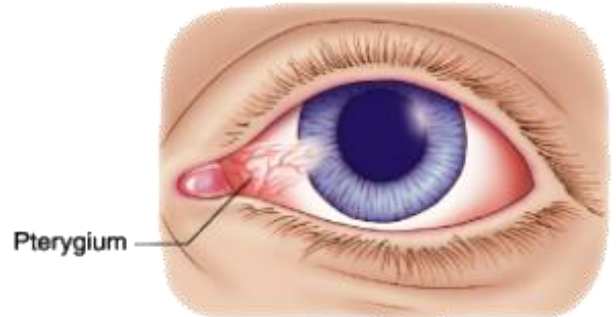


# Pterygium

## WHAT IS PTERYGIUM?

A pterygium is a triangular-shaped lump of tissue which grows from the conjunctiva (the thin membrane which covers the white of the eye) on to the cornea (the clear front window to the eye).

Advanced pterygia are usually visible to the naked eye and can occur in both eyes. They usually form on the side of the eye closer to the nose. A pterygium is not a cancerous lesion.



## WHAT CAUSES PTERYGIA?

The exact causes of pterygia are not known, but they are strongly associated with exposure to ultraviolet radiation and hot, dry environments.

Pterygia are more common in the Northern parts of Australia, although are seen readily in South Australia, and among people such as farmers and surfers who spend a lot of time outdoors, but anyone can develop a pterygium.

## ARE PTERYGIA DANGEROUS?

Pterygia are not dangerous, although they can look ugly and cause some discomfort.

The main problem with pterygia is that as they grow onto the cornea, they distort the corneal shape and therefore interfere with vision. If the pterygium grows on to the central part of the cornea it can begin to block light from entering the eye.

Although a pterygium is not dangerous, it should be checked to make sure it is not something more serious.

If you have any area of tissue on or around the eyes that changes in appearance rapidly you should consult an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist regularly for monitoring.

## HOW CAN PTERYGIA BE TREATED?

In cases where the pterygium is actively growing onto the cornea and threatening to distort the vision, the only effective treatment is surgical removal.

Fortunately, this is relatively minor surgery which usually is performed under local anaesthetic. It is best to have surgery before the pterygium progresses to the point at which it interferes with vision as surgery can cause scarring and therefore permanent vision damage. Your optometrist can assess the pterygium and refer you to an eye surgeon if it requires removal.



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## HOW CAN PTERYGIA BE PREVENTED?

The best way to reduce your risk of developing a pterygium is to protect your eyes from ultraviolet light.

UV radiation can also cause cataracts and other eye diseases, as well as skin cancers, so reducing exposure is a wise move.

The best ways of doing this are to:

- Avoid the sun, especially from 10am to 4pm.
- Wear a broad-brimmed hat which will reduce the amount of UV radiation reaching your eyes.
- Wear sunglasses (wrap-arounds are best).
- Once present, keep pterygia lubricated with good quality ocular lubricating drops.
- Visit your optometrist regularly for monitoring.



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