

# Pterygium

This material will help you understand pterygium (plural pterygia), its causes, and how it may be treated.

## What is a pterygium?

A pterygium (pronounced tur-IJ-ee-um) is a raised, triangular-shaped growth of tissue on the surface of the eye. Pterygium comes from the Greek word for “wing,” which also describes the shape of this growth. It normally extends from the inner corner towards the center the eye and onto the cornea.

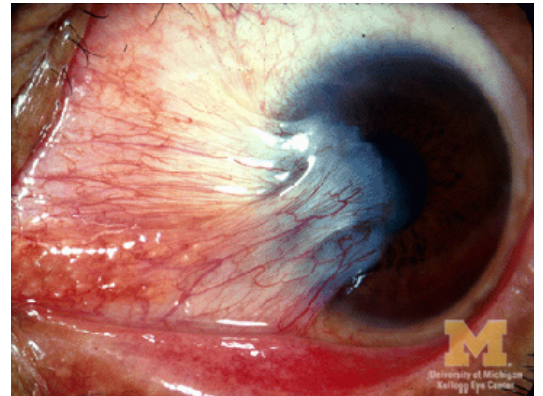


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The cornea is the clear window in the front of the eye that helps focus light into your eye. If the pterygium grows over the cornea, your vision will likely be affected. If the growth becomes large enough, it can change the shape of the cornea’s surface, leading to **astigmatism**.

## What causes a pterygium?

The exact cause of pterygia is not well understood. Ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun is the main risk factor, but dry eyes and long-term exposure to wind and dust may play a role. More cases of pterygium are usually seen in sunny, windy climates. Due to this, the condition is sometimes called “surfer’s eye.”

A pterygium can also develop from a **pinguecula** (pronounced pin-GWEK-yoo-lah). A pinguecula is a small yellow spot or bump that also grows on the surface of the eye near the cornea.

## **How is a pterygium treated?**

In most cases, treatment for a pterygium is not needed. If your pterygium is red and swollen or causes you discomfort, your eye doctor may prescribe lubricating or steroid eye drops to help relieve these symptoms. If your pterygium has grown large enough to cause vision problems, your eye doctor may recommend surgery to remove it.

You and your doctor will discuss the treatment option that is best for you.

Limited exposure to the factors that lead to these growths may help prevent your pterygium from reoccurring or growing bigger. You can do this by:

- Wearing sunglasses when you are outside
- Wearing glasses or goggles to protect eyes from dust and debris
- Using artificial tears when your eyes are feeling dry

**For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.**



<http://kellogg.umich.edu/patientcare/conditions/pterygium.html>



<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/pinguecula-pterygium.cfm>

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Last Revised 03/2015