

## PTERYGIUM

A pterygium (tuh-ridge-ee-um) is a small triangular-shaped pinkish growth on the conjunctiva (membrane covering the eye) and cornea (the clear surface that lies over the iris, the colored part of the eye). A pterygium is not a cancer and it is not a cataract, nor is it likely to lead to these conditions.

Some pterygia grow slowly throughout a person's life. Others reach a point of maximum growth and stop. As a rule, a pterygium does not interfere with vision unless it grows so far onto the cornea that it begins to cover the pupil.

Most people are more concerned with the appearance than with any possible visual difficulty. It is usually not too noticeable unless it becomes inflamed and red, which can result from dust, smoke, pollutants in the air, or swimming pools.

### *What causes a Pterygium?*

Pterygia are most common in sunny climates. People who have them have usually spent a good part of their lives outdoors, in a lot of sun, wind, and dust. Most doctors feel that they are a response by the outer eye membranes to chronic irritation, especially from ultraviolet light.

### *Treatment*

Over-the-counter decongestant eyedrops will reduce the redness and may provide relief from chronic irritation. Do not use them more than four times a day, however, as they can cause a rebound redness if overused.

Surgery is the only way to remove a pterygium, but it is not usually recommended unless the pterygium is affecting your vision. Surgery leaves a visible scar on the cornea and conjunctiva, so this must be taken into account if you are considering removal for reasons of appearance. There is also the possibility that it will grow back after surgery and could look even worse than originally. Then, a second removal, often accompanied by mild radiation treatment, may be needed. In extreme cases, if the pterygium recurs even after a second surgery, a membrane graft may help solve the problem.