

# Pingueculum / Pingueculae

Pingueculae are often confused with pterygia.

A pingueculum is a soft yellowish thickening of the conjunctiva adjacent to the cornea.

It is similar to a pterygium, but does not grow onto the cornea.

Although it can be removed easily, this is rarely necessary.



NORMAL EYE



PINGUECULA



PTERYGIUM

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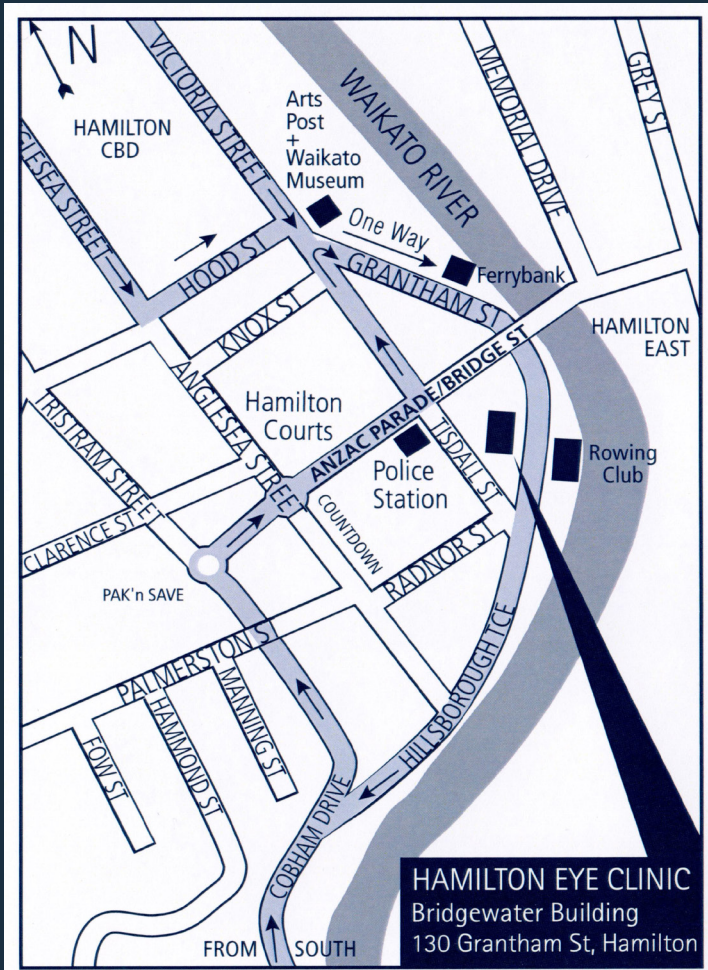
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# What is a Pterygium



Waikato's Largest Specialist Eye Centre and Eye Surgery Facility



# A Guide to Pterygium

A pterygium/pterygia is a wing-shaped extension of thickened tissue on the surface (conjunctiva) of the white of the eye, which grows onto the adjacent cornea (the window into the eye). Pterygia are benign growths (not cancers), which can continue to grow across the eye and eventually seriously affect sight. It is a fairly common condition. It may occur in one or both eyes.

Pterygia generally start in susceptible young adults, and gradually increase in size over the years. In some people, growth may cease after a period, and particularly in the elderly, they may become inactive.

## Causes

The causes of pterygia are not clearly understood, but it is known that the ultraviolet rays present in sunlight, as well as chronic irritation due to dust etc, play a major part in their development and growth.

They are more common in people between the ages of 20 and 50 years and more common in men. Those who have spent a great deal of time outdoors, are also particularly prone.

People who live in tropical climates, sports people such as sailors and skiers who are subject to a lot of reflected ultraviolet light, and populations living where there is ozone layer depletion, have a higher incidence.

## Symptoms

Symptoms include recurrent redness, a feeling of irritation, and watering, although some people may not have any symptoms. If the pterygium grows too far across the cornea, it may affect sight.

## Treatment

Protection from the elements (wind, dust, sea water, sunlight etc) is important; particularly the wearing of a hat and UV filtering sun-glasses, when outdoors. This will reduce symptoms, and prevent progression. It will also reduce the risk of recurrence following removal.

In addition, for small pterygia which do not seem to be growing and for which surgery is not necessary, lubricant drops, and occasional decongestant drops that reduce the redness, may be prescribed.

If the pterygium appears to be growing, removal is necessary before it gets to the point where it starts to affect vision. If it is left to grow too far across the cornea, residual scarring means that even after excision vision will not return to normal.

## Reasons for removal

- Threat to normal vision - a large pterygium can blur vision and may grow over the pupil
- Irritation, excess of tears and/or discomfort - persistent burning and gritty feeling in the eye
- Redness - due to blood vessels that are related to the Pterygium, eyedrops can temporarily reduce the redness and may be helpful
- Astigmatism - the pterygium may alter the curve of the cornea which can produce astigmatism and lead to distorted vision
- Interference with the wearing of contact lenses due to discomfort
- Cosmetic - some people may want to have the pterygium removed if it becomes unsightly

## Surgical Excision

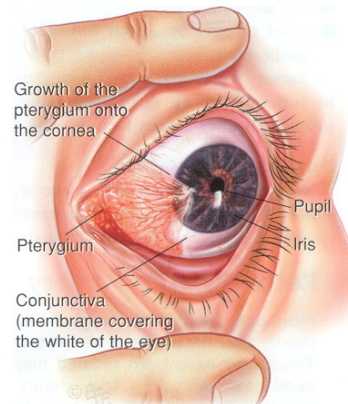
### Anaesthesia

Surgery is generally performed using local anaesthesia. This means the patient is awake during the procedure and drops and surface injections are used to numb the eye.

In a minority of cases, where the patient is very apprehensive or claustrophobic, a general anaesthetic may be used. You should discuss this with your ophthalmologist.

### Surgical procedure

A small cut in the conjunctiva (membrane covering the white of the eye) surrounding the pterygium. The pterygium is then shaved from the cornea.



A small area of conjunctiva (from under the upper eyelid) is moved to cover the exposed site of the excised pterygium.

The healthy tissue retards the re-growth of the pterygium.

## Recovery

You can go home shortly after surgery. You will need someone to drive you home. Following surgery, the eye tends to be quite uncomfortable for a few days and may not settle completely for about a month. Paracetamol or codeine/paracetamol are usually sufficient for the first few days.

You will have a followup appointment booked to check on your recovery. You should wear sunglasses when outdoors to avoid bright sunlight.

Although recovery times vary amongst patients, complete healing after three months is usual.

## Complications

As with any surgical procedure, complications can occasionally happen, even though your ophthalmologist makes every attempt to minimise risks. Most of these are generally not serious. They include:

- Redness - the site might be red for a while, this usually clears over time this can be managed with drops if necessary
- A feeling of “grit in the eye”, irritation and dryness may persist for a while this can be managed with drops if necessary
- During healing some people have significant pain and may require a prescription painkiller
- A granuloma or “proud flesh” may develop where the pterygium was removed. Eyedrops usually resolve this.
- Some scarring of the cornea may occur where the pterygium was growing into the cornea, but this is usually slight. Occasionally this may lead to a slight vision reduction.
- Recurrence. A pterygium may grow back. These often grow more rapidly than the initial pterygium. Of every 100 patients, 5-15 may have a recurrence.
- Wound infection is uncommon to rare
- Bleeding is unusual and should be reported to your ophthalmologist
- Rarely, one of the muscles that move the eye can be damaged at the time of surgery, this may cause double vision
- Very rarely, possibly one in several thousand eye surgeries, a patient may lose all vision in an eye due to a complication.