

Pinguecula

What is a Pinguecula?

A pinguecula is a common, non-cancerous, yellowish growth on the conjunctiva (clear tissue covering the white of the eye) of the eye. It most commonly grows next to the cornea at either the 3 or 9 o'clock position, usually on the nasal side but it can grow on the temporal side of the eye.

What are the Causes of a Pinguecula?

The cause is not completely known but it is directly correlated with ultraviolet radiation from chronic sun exposure and therefore more common in tropical climates. It has also been associated with persistent ocular irritation from dusty or windy environments or occupational irritants such as welding.

A biopsy of a pinguecula shows degeneration or degradation of the collagen fibers in the conjunctiva. The conjunctival degeneration creates swelling and enlargement of the tissue that would normally be smooth and flat.

Pingueculae are more common in middle-aged or older people but they can show up earlier if a person is in the sun frequently. A pinguecula may progress over time and grow larger especially if sun protection (sunglasses) is not used.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of a Pinguecula?

Other than the visible yellowish nodule that appears on the eye, pingueculae typically do not cause any symptoms. However, if they become large enough, they can cause the eye to become dry, irritated and red. A pinguecula can also make it difficult to wear contact lenses due to dryness and irritation from the elevation of the contact lens edge over the pinguecula.

A pinguecula is entirely different than a pterygium, which has more serious potential complications and can interfere with vision if it progresses without treatment.

What is the Treatment for a Pinguecula ?

A pinguecula is a benign condition and therefore requires no treatment unless the eye becomes inflamed or irritated. Over the counter artificial tears are used as needed for dry eyes and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory or corticosteroid eye drops may be prescribed short-term for inflammation associated with a pinguecula. The steroid eye drops do not make the pinguecula go away. If it is a major cosmetic concern or if it causes discomfort or interferes with blinking the pinguecula may be surgically removed. Surgery is only done in severe cases because there is a high rate of recurrences after pinguecula surgery.