

Pterygium

A pterygium (pronounced ter-ig-ee-um) is a pink- or yellowish, triangular shaped growth on the cornea. Some pterygia grow slowly throughout a person's life, while others stop growing after a point. Rarely a pterygium will grow so large that it begins to cover the pupil of the eye.

Pterygia are more common in sunny climates (closer to the equator) and in the 20-40 year old age group. We do not know what causes pterygia to develop, but many doctors believe ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun is a factor as they are most common in warmer climates and in patients who spend a lot of time outside. In these areas, wearing protective eyeglasses, sunglasses, and/or hats with brims is recommended.

Because it is visible, many patients want their pterygium removed for cosmetic reasons. Unless one becomes red and swollen from dust or other air pollutants, they are not very noticeable to others. Surgery to remove a pterygium is not usually recommended unless it affects vision or is very symptomatic (constant irritation or foreign body sensation in the affected eye). When a pterygium is surgically removed, it may grow back, especially if the patient is younger (under 40). Lubricants can provide relief from the chronic irritation and may reduce redness. Your eye doctor may prescribe an anti-inflammatory or steroid drop as well.