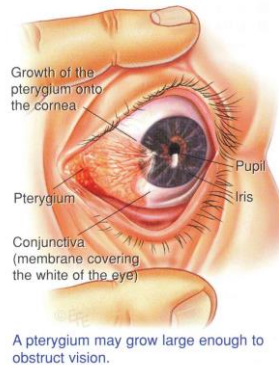


PTERYGIUM SURGERY

What is a pterygium?

The white part of the eye is covered by a membrane called the conjunctiva. You may have heard of the term used before – an infection of this membrane is called conjunctivitis.

A **pterygium** is a wedge-shaped growth of abnormal conjunctiva. It usually starts growing near the inside of the corner of the eye, and grows over the cornea towards the pupil.



What caused it to grow?

No one knows for sure, but it is believed to be an abnormal growth stimulated by UV / sun damage, worsened by exposure to sun, dust and wind. People who live in tropical climates or spend a lot of time outdoors are often affected.

How can it be treated?

In many cases, it can be left alone, especially if it is not affecting vision. However, if you do have a pterygium then it would be wise to wear sunglasses (polarized, wraparound ones are the best), and a wide brimmed hat whenever you are out in the sun.

If a pterygium gets inflamed (red and stinging), lubricating drops or ointment will often soothe and reduce the inflammation. Sometimes anti-inflammatory drops may also be prescribed to be used sparingly.

What are the reasons for surgical removal?

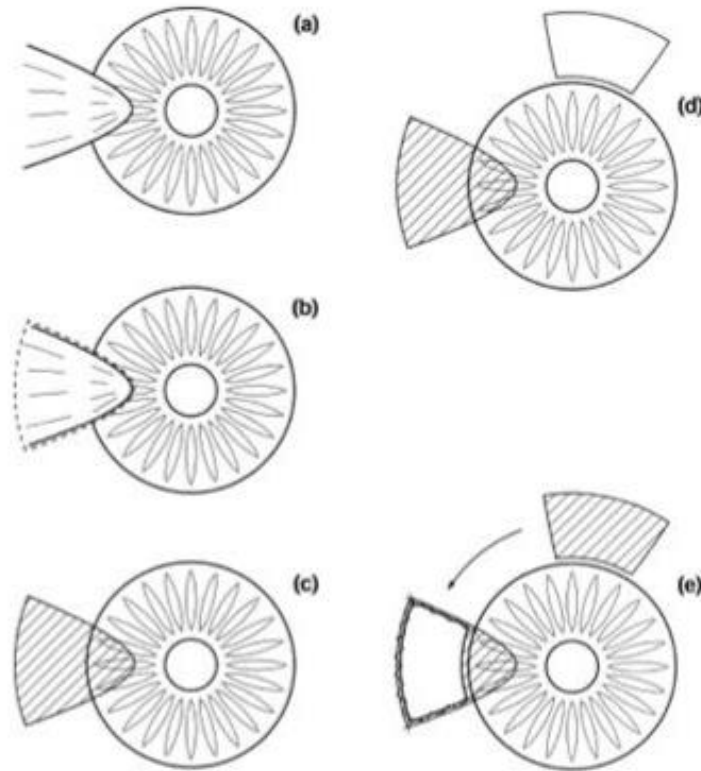
If the pterygium is large, it can threaten to cover the pupil. It can also cause a distortion of the cornea (called astigmatism). Because these 2 reasons would affect eyesight, surgical removal is recommended.

Sometimes, the discomfort or appearance of the pterygium is annoying enough to warrant considering surgery. These are less urgent reasons, and the benefits of surgery must be weighed against the risks.

How is the surgery performed?

The procedure will be done in a hospital, and you will be put under general anaesthetic. The pterygium is carefully removed from the cornea and dissected off the eye.

Over half of operated pterygia will return if the surgery is stopped here. To prevent the pterygium from growing back, I will remove some healthy conjunctiva from another part of the eye, usually from under the lid (which has been protected from the sun). This piece of healthy conjunctiva is transferred to cover the area where the pterygium used to be.



(a) Pterygium (b) Pterygium removed (c) Area under pterygium is bare (d) A healthy piece of conjunctiva is outlined (e) Graft is sutured into place

What happens after the operation?

I normally place a contact lens over the eye, to reduce pain and discomfort for the first couple of days. I will see you in the Figtree rooms the day after the operation to review you and give you further information, and then a few days later to remove the contact lens.

Plan not to work or drive for about a week, but you will not need to cover your eye after the first night. There will be stitches on the grafted piece of conjunctiva, but these will dissolve after several weeks. You will be using drops for up to 3 months after the operation to prevent infection, reduce inflammation and reduce the chance of recurrence.

What are the risks of surgery?

All operations carry the risk of bleeding and infection. For this particular surgery, there is a risk of recurrence of pterygium, poor vision, loss of corneal clarity, double vision and residual redness of the conjunctiva.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to Dr Gajus.

(diagram used with permission from Dr Laurie Sullivan)