

## What is a pterygium?



A pterygium is a wing-shaped growth that encroaches onto the cornea (clear surface on the front of the eye).

It is usually due to excessive ultraviolet (UV) exposure and is common in Australia due to the strong UV radiation here. It's commonly known as 'surfer's eye'.



### What causes a pterygium?

Pterygia are most common in people in their 20s and 30s.

It is usually caused by environmental factors, in particular excessive exposure to UV radiation, windy and dusty conditions.

### What are the symptoms of pterygium?

Many people do not have any symptoms from their pterygium.

As it grows larger, it may start to distort the cornea and cause visual blurring. It may cause discomfort and become intermittently red and irritated. If it is raised, then it can cause a "foreign body" type sensation.

### How is a pterygium diagnosed?

Your ophthalmologist can diagnose this with an eye exam.

A **test called topography** may also be done to measure the shape of the cornea and to see if the pterygium is causing any distortion.

### How is a pterygium treated?

Asymptomatic pterygia may not require any treatment.

If the pterygium is causing irritation and discomfort, sometimes simple measures such as using **lubricant drops** can be helpful. Otherwise, the pterygium may need to be removed surgically.

If the pterygium is larger and causing visual problems, then it may need to be **removed surgically**.

Surgery is usually done under local anaesthetic. It involves excising the pterygium, and replacing the bare area on the white part of the eye with a thin mucous membrane (conjunctival autograft) taken from the top part of your eye. This conjunctival autograft helps with the healing, prevents recurrence, and achieves a good cosmetic result.

Need to  
know more?

Please contact the Lions Eye Institute to make an appointment with one of our ophthalmologists.  
Phone: (08) 9381 0777; email: [carecentre@lei.org.au](mailto:carecentre@lei.org.au); or see our website: [lei.org.au](http://lei.org.au)