

Pterygium, pinguecula and conjunctival lesions

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What are pterygium, pinuecula and conjunctival lesions?

Pterygium (pronounced tur-IJ-ee-um) and pinguecula (pronounced pin-GWEK-yoo-la) are growths on the cornea, the clear front window of the eye, and the conjunctiva, the thin filmy membrane that covers the white part of the eye, the sclera. Both types of growth are believed to be caused by dry eye and environmental elements such as wind, dust and ultraviolet light.

Sometimes other growths or “lesions” can develop which may mimic a pterygium or pinguecula, but may be pre-cancerous or cancerous growths. We refer to these as ocular surface dysplasia or neoplasia. At the time of your surgery, Dr Adams will send a tissue sample to the pathologist to check if there is any evidence of dysplasia or neoplasia.

How do we treat pterygium, pinguecula and other conjunctival lesions?

If you have no symptoms and Dr Adams is satisfied that there are no suspicious features, in many cases no treatment is needed. If these growths becomes red and irritated, eye drops or ointments can reduce the inflammation. If the growths become large enough to threaten sight or cause persistent discomfort, or display any features of dysplasia, they can be removed surgically. Some people also want them removed for cosmetic reasons.

What happens in surgery?

This is day surgery only, which takes around 45 minutes.

Even though the surgery is relatively short, expect to spend several hours (most of the day) at the hospital as there will be time before surgery preparing you, and time afterwards where you recover from the anaesthetic. The surgery is most frequently performed under sedation with local anaesthetic to paralyse the eye and numb the area around it. Dr Adams will remove a small flap of tissue – a “graft” – from underneath the eyelid and graft it into the space created by the removed growth, attaching it with either special tissue glue or stitches. If Dr Adams has concerns about possible dysplasia, she will generally not use a graft. Your eye is then covered with a protective eye pad which can be removed the next morning. The eye is quite uncomfortable for the first few days so plan at least five days off work.

Risks of surgery

The pterygium or pingueculum or lesion may recur. To reduce the chances of this happening, make sure you use your drops as directed and wear sunglasses.

Rarely, you may have double vision which usually settles, and an extremely rare complication is for the eye to be damaged leading to visual loss.