CONDITION

Pinguecula

A pinguecula is a small, raised yellow-white patch on the clear tissue covering the white of the eye.

WHAT IT IS
Benign raised patch on the eye's conjunctiva

BODY SYSTEM
Eyes

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Yellow-white bump, dryness, irritation, redness

WHAT CAUSES IT
Ultraviolet light, dryness, wind, and dust

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED
Eye examination, usually with a slit lamp

MAIN TREATMENT
Lubrication, environmental protection, and anti-inflammatory treatment

CAN IT BE CURED?
Sometimes - surgery removes it, but recurrence can occur

IS IT AN EMERGENCY?
No - sudden vision changes suggest another problem

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK
Usually harmless, persistent, and slow-changing

Overview

A pinguecula is a small, slightly raised patch on the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is the thin, clear membrane that covers the white part of your eye and lines your eyelids.

The patch is usually white, cream, or yellow. It most often develops beside the cornea, which is the clear window at the front of the eye. Many pingueculae appear on the side closest to the nose, although they can occur on either side.

A pinguecula is a benign change, meaning it is not cancer. It contains altered tissue and deposits of protein, fat, or calcium. It usually develops gradually after years of exposure to ultraviolet light and drying conditions.

Most pingueculae do not affect eyesight or need removal. However, the patch may sometimes

become inflamed, feel uncomfortable, or interfere with the smooth layer of tears over the eye. Because other eye growths can look similar, a new or changing patch should be examined rather than identified from appearance alone.

A pinguecula is different from a pterygium. A pterygium is a wedge-shaped growth that extends onto the cornea and can sometimes affect vision. A pinguecula remains on the conjunctiva, although both conditions share similar environmental risk factors.

Symptoms

Many people have no symptoms beyond seeing a small patch on the white of the eye. It may be more noticeable when the eye is red or dry.

Possible symptoms include:

Inflammation of the patch is called pingueculitis. It can make the area swollen, red, and sore. Wind, dust, dry air, smoke, or prolonged sun exposure may trigger or worsen irritation.

A pinguecula usually does not cause significant pain, light sensitivity, discharge, or loss of vision. Those symptoms may have another cause and deserve prompt assessment.

- A raised yellow-white or cream-coloured patch
- A dry, gritty, burning, or scratchy feeling
- Redness around the patch
- A feeling that something is in the eye
- Discomfort when wearing contact lenses

Causes and risk factors

A pinguecula develops when tissue in the conjunctiva changes over time. Long-term exposure to ultraviolet radiation from sunlight is considered an important cause. Ultraviolet radiation is invisible energy that can damage exposed tissue.

Dryness and repeated environmental irritation may also contribute. Risk may be higher if you spend substantial time outdoors or in bright, dusty, windy, or dry conditions.

Factors associated with pinguecula include:

Younger people can develop a pinguecula, especially with substantial outdoor exposure. It is not caused by an infection and cannot spread from one person to another.

Computer and phone screens are not known to cause pingueculae. Screen use can reduce how

often you blink, however, which may make dryness and irritation around an existing patch more noticeable.

- Frequent or prolonged sun exposure
- Living or working in a sunny environment
- Wind, dust, sand, or smoke exposure
- Dry eye and low-humidity conditions
- Increasing age

Diagnosis

An optometrist or ophthalmologist can usually identify a pinguecula by examining your eye. An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor specialising in eye care.

The examination may include checking your vision and looking at the front of your eye through a slit lamp. A slit lamp is a microscope with a bright, narrow beam of light. It provides a magnified view of the conjunctiva, cornea, and nearby structures.

The position and appearance of the patch usually distinguish a pinguecula from a pterygium. A pterygium grows over the edge of the cornea, while a pinguecula stays on the white of the eye.

Photographs may be taken if the patch needs monitoring. A sample of tissue, called a biopsy, is rarely needed. It may be considered if a growth has unusual features or changes in a way that does not fit a typical pinguecula.

Treatment and management

A pinguecula that is not causing symptoms generally does not need medical treatment. Routine eye examinations can confirm that it remains typical in appearance.

Lubricating eye drops, also called artificial tears, can reduce dryness, grittiness, and mild irritation. Lubricating gels or ointments last longer but may temporarily blur vision. A pharmacist or eye care professional can help you choose an appropriate type, particularly if you wear contact lenses or need drops frequently.

If the patch becomes inflamed, an eye care professional may prescribe a short course of anti-inflammatory eye treatment. Some of these medicines contain a corticosteroid like prednisone or hydrocortisone . Steroid eye drops require supervision because inappropriate or prolonged use can increase eye pressure, delay healing, or contribute to infection and

cataracts.

Protecting the eye from sun, wind, and dust may reduce irritation. Wraparound sunglasses, a brimmed hat, and protective eyewear can help limit exposure. Taking breaks from contact lenses may be helpful during a flare, but follow the advice given for your lenses and eye health.

Surgical removal is uncommon. It may be considered when a pinguecula causes ongoing discomfort despite other treatment, repeatedly becomes inflamed, interferes with contact lens wear, or is a major cosmetic concern.

Surgery can leave redness or scarring, and the patch can return. Cosmetic concerns should therefore be balanced against the risks and expected benefits of the procedure.

Complications

Complications are uncommon. The most frequent problem is pingueculitis, in which the tissue becomes inflamed. This may settle with lubrication and avoiding environmental triggers, although persistent inflammation may require prescribed treatment.

A raised patch can interrupt the tear film, the thin layer of moisture covering the eye. This can contribute to a dry or gritty feeling. It may also make a contact lens uncomfortable or affect how it sits.

A typical pinguecula does not spread inside the eye and does not become eye cancer. However, not every patch on the conjunctiva is a pinguecula. Changes in size, shape, colour, surface, or blood vessels should be assessed to rule out other conditions.

A pinguecula itself usually does not affect sight because it does not cover the cornea. Blurred vision should not automatically be attributed to it.

Prevention

There is no guaranteed way to prevent a pinguecula. Tissue changes can develop after many years, and individual susceptibility differs.

Reducing ultraviolet exposure may lower the chance of developing one or help limit further irritation. Choose sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB radiation. A wraparound design gives more protection from light entering at the sides.

A brimmed hat provides additional shade. Protective glasses are useful in dusty, sandy, or windy settings and when workplace eye protection is required.

Managing dry-eye symptoms may make an existing pinguecula more comfortable, but it will

not remove the patch. Avoiding smoke and directing fans or air conditioning away from your face may reduce drying. Regular blinking and screen breaks may also ease dryness during close work.

Living with it and what to expect

A pinguecula usually remains present for years. Lubricating drops can improve symptoms, but they do not dissolve the tissue. The patch may stay the same size or slowly become more noticeable.

Symptoms can come and go. Your eye may feel normal for long periods, then become irritated after sun, wind, dust, smoke, or dry-air exposure. These episodes do not necessarily mean the patch is becoming dangerous.

Most people continue their usual work, exercise, travel, and hobbies without restrictions. Sunglasses and suitable eye protection may make outdoor activities more comfortable.

Contact lens wear may remain possible. If a lens rubs against the raised area or the eye becomes inflamed, you may need the lens fit reviewed or may need to pause lens use while symptoms settle.

Routine eye examinations are usually enough when the patch has a typical appearance and is not changing. Arrange a non-urgent review if it becomes larger, looks different, repeatedly becomes inflamed, or causes continuing discomfort.

When to get medical help

Arrange a routine eye appointment if you notice a new patch or lump on the eye. An examination can confirm whether it is a pinguecula or another type of growth.

Also seek a routine or prompt appointment if:

Seek urgent eye care for marked pain, strong sensitivity to light, sudden blurred or reduced vision, or significant swelling. These are not typical features of an uncomplicated pinguecula.

Get emergency help after a chemical splash, penetrating injury, or sudden major loss of vision. If a chemical enters the eye, begin rinsing it immediately with plenty of clean, lukewarm water while arranging emergency care.

- The patch is growing or changing colour or shape
- Redness or irritation does not settle

- It repeatedly becomes inflamed
- It interferes with contact lenses
- You develop persistent blurred vision
- You are unsure whether symptoms are caused by the patch

Common questions

Can a pinguecula go away on its own?

It usually does not disappear. Lubricating or anti-inflammatory treatment can settle dryness, redness, and irritation, but it does not remove the patch. Surgery can remove it when there is a strong reason, although recurrence is possible.

Is a pinguecula cancer?

No. A typical pinguecula is a benign tissue change. Because some other conjunctival growths can look similar, have a new or changing patch examined rather than assuming what it is.

What is the difference between a pinguecula and a pterygium?

A pinguecula is a raised patch that stays on the conjunctiva beside the cornea. A pterygium is a fleshy, often wedge-shaped growth that crosses onto the cornea. A pterygium may affect vision if it grows far enough toward the centre.

Can a pinguecula affect my eyesight?

It usually does not. It sits outside the cornea and normally causes irritation rather than vision loss. Dryness may cause temporary fluctuating blur, but persistent or sudden vision changes need a separate assessment.

Can I wear contact lenses with a pinguecula?

Many people can, but the raised tissue may rub against a lens or make it less comfortable. Do not wear a lens in a painful, very red, or inflamed eye. An eye care professional can check the lens fit and the health of the eye's surface.

Which eye drops help a pinguecula?

Lubricating drops can help dryness and grittiness. Inflamed tissue may need prescribed anti-inflammatory drops. Redness-relief drops do not remove the pinguecula, and some are unsuitable for frequent use. Steroid eye drops should only be used under professional supervision.

Sources

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