

The Quick Summary

You have a growth on your eye. This growth won't affect any other part of your body.

Pterygium

Dr. Shalwala sees a pterygium on your eyeball. This is a growth of tissue on the surface of the eyeball that starts moving onto what should be the clear "windshield." It is not a dangerous type of growth, but it can cause issues by growing toward the "visual axis," which is the path that light takes into your eye so that you can see.

The only way to fix a pterygium is to surgically remove it. There are two situations in which we do that.

1. We remove a pterygium if it is inducing irregular astigmatism in the cornea. This means that the growth is "pulling" on the cornea and warping its shape so that it is hard to even find a good pair of glasses to help you see better.
2. We remove a pterygium if it appears to be growing into the visual axis. Imagine if the growth were to grow all the way across your pupil, where light enters your eye. You would hardly be able to see anything! We could remove the growth, but sometimes there is subtle scarring under the pterygium that is hard to fix. That's why if it gets close to where we might think it will grow over, we go ahead and remove it rather than taking chances with the scarring.

Unfortunately, if it does not cause astigmatism changes and does not appear to be getting into the visual axis, insurance considers this a cosmetic problem and will not pay for removal. That means that redness is not a reason to remove a pterygium according to insurance. This can be frustrating for all of us, but, sadly, none of us are in charge of determining what insurance companies will pay for.

It is also important to note that the goal of surgery is to preserve and improve the vision. The goal of surgery is NOT to remove redness or an undesirable appearance. Often, there is still redness that persists after the surgery is complete. One last important note that the pterygium can grow back again.



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