A Complete Guide to Pterygium Surgery
How you see the world truly matters. A lot of us take it for granted, but Dr. Alberto Martinez does not. Your vision is his passion and life’s work.
Having come to the U.S. from Colombia as an economic refugee, Dr. Martinez came to America to pursue the American dream. He worked in blue-collar jobs for three years and then served in the United States Navy for six years before finishing college summa cum laude at American University, and being admitted to Georgetown University Medical School.

Dr. Martinez has a great passion for helping those with a pterygium or pinguecula, based on his and his family’s own difficult personal experience with pterygium. Not only did they suffer symptom wise, but it also caused each of them to be quite self-conscious of the appearance of their eyes. After becoming a surgeon, tops on his list was to perform pterygium surgeries on his father and three sisters. After seeing the smile it brought to their faces and the beautiful whites of their eyes, he was hooked and dedicated himself to helping those with a pterygium.

Dr. Martinez had his own first pterygium removed while a resident in ophthalmology and recently had the pterygium in his other eye removed. As one of the most sought after pterygium surgeons, he felt that while each of the surgeries removed the pterygiums, he was disappointed with the overall surgical experience having hoped for a better cosmetic outcome, the type of outcome his pterygium surgical patients typically receive. Thus, he is devoted to helping those who suffer from a pterygium, as he knows firsthand the impact it can have in so many ways, physically and mentally.

Dr. Martinez is passionately committed to offering the finest vision health care to his patients combined with the latest in advanced technology and a loving touch. As the founder and Medical Director of Visionary Eye Doctors, he has put together a high performance team in the ophthalmology world to address your precise needs with the highest of care, attention to detail and a genuine interest in your vision and how it impacts your world.

Dr. Martinez is a board-certified ophthalmologist and a member of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery. Dr. Martinez’s skill, expertise, experience and compassionate, kind demeanor have earned him great respect in the community. He is a regionally, nationally and internationally sought-after corneal, cataract and pterygium surgeon. In fact, he often is the choice for local health professionals who trust him for their eye health care and that of their families.

Since the inception in 2003 of Washingtonian Magazine’s Top Doctors issues, Dr. Martinez’s peers have each year elected him as a ‘Top Doc’ for ophthalmology. Dr. Martinez participated in the initial studies that led to the FDA approval of LASIK. He has previously been honored
as ‘Teacher of the Year’ unanimously by the residents at Georgetown University School of Medicine, Washington, DC.

Always ahead of the curve, Dr. Martinez is often one of the first to offer new techniques and treatments to his patients. LenSx® femtosecond laser, one of the greatest technological advances in laser cataract surgery in the past 20 years, became available in 2011, and Dr. Martinez was one of the very few surgeons in the mid-Atlantic region who had access to this technology and made it available to his patients. In addition, he is one of even fewer surgeons who have used and studied more than one laser platform for cataract surgery. Recently, based on largescale evidence-based clinical findings of his own patients, he changed to the CATALYS® femtosecond laser for laser-assisted cataract surgery.

After 20 years in practice, Dr. Martinez has performed more than 15,000 procedures including cataract, cornea transplant, complex reconstruction of the eye and LASIK. He has performed over 1,000 laser-assisted cataract surgeries with a success rate of approximately 99%, and a more accurate, gentler and safer surgery. Modern cataract surgery is one of the most performed and most successful procedures performed today.

Additionally, Dr. Martinez has performed more than 11,000 pterygiectomies with an amazingly low recurrence rate of 0.6%. This is one of the lowest rates of the pterygium growing back in the world. He achieves these results by using specialized and progressive surgical techniques he continues to hone and improve each day. Other ophthalmic surgeons may have up to a 15% recurrence rate with similar, but not identical, techniques. His impressive low recurrence rates have been studied and recognized internationally, positioning Dr. Martinez as a pterygium ‘Top Surgeon,’ receiving referrals and patients from all over the world.

In 2014, Dr. Martinez established a clinical research program for Pterygium, the EyeWhite Pterygium|Pinguecula Institute and has published and presented clinical studies both nationally and internationally.
Dr. Martinez is a long-time resident of Montgomery County, where he serves on several boards, including the Lions Club and the Board of Directors at Strathmore Music Center. He is also the founder and president of the Visionary Foundation, a nonprofit organization that focuses on eye surgical missions to impoverished countries in Central America.

Dr. Martinez’s passion to improve his patient’s quality of life is evident throughout every aspect of his practice. All of the Visionary Eye Doctors specialists share the same level of commitment and compassion to produce the best possible outcome and improve our patient’s lives and how they see the world.
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Pterygium is a benign growth of the conjunctiva (lining of the white part of the eye) that grows into the cornea, which covers the iris (colored part of the eye). It can eventually lead to impaired vision.

Patients with pterygium often first notice the condition because of the appearance of a lesion on their eye or because of dry, itchy irritation. Other symptoms include dryness, redness, irritation, inflammation, and tearing. In more severe cases, the pterygium grows over the pupil and limits vision.

Pinguecula is a growth that looks like a yellow spot or bump on the white part of the eye and often appears on the side of the eye near your nose, often a pterygium starts as a pinguecula. It can stay small or once it grows large enough to reach the cornea, it becomes a pterygium.

Although the causes of pterygium are not entirely known, it is believed to be caused mainly by exposure to UV light. Another suspected risk is living in a dry, dusty, windy environment. People who live near the equator or play water sports such as surfing and fishing may be more likely to develop pterygium. Prolonged exposure to these conditions causes the conjunctiva to thicken and the eye to become red and irritated. Collagen in the eye begins to worsen, and the eye weakens.
Studies show that there may also be a genetic predisposition to pterygium, with a higher prevalence in men than in women.

**COMMON SYMPTOMS OF PTERYGIUM OR PINGUECULA?**

Symptoms include:
- Dryness
- Redness
- Irritation
- Inflammation
- Tearing
- A gritty feeling similar to ‘dirt in the eyes’
- Disappointing cosmetic appearance

The Pterygium may grow over the pupil and limit your vision.

**PREVENTION**

Sunglasses that block UV rays, particularly sunglasses that provide side coverage, are a good means of protection against pterygium. Wearing a hat with a brim to block sunlight is also helpful. In hot, dry climates, artificial tears (eye drops) should be used to help lubricate the eyes.
In some cases, the symptoms caused by pterygium can be calmed with dry eye drops (artificial tears) and steroid drops. As the pterygium grows, the symptoms may become resistant to the eye drops.

Surgery is the only way to definitely remove a pterygium. Depending on the state of your eye and when vision or eye comfort becomes affected by progressive growth of a pterygium, surgery is strongly recommended. If you feel self-conscious or your well-being is impacted by the appearance of the pterygium, surgery may be the best option as well.

The Advanced Sutureless Amniotic Membrane Pterygiectomy Procedure

The ASAP™ Procedure – For a Superior Cosmetic Outcome

- Incredibly successful, advanced autograft technique using tissue ‘glue’ for a no-stitches approach to the pterygium removal procedure.
- The abnormal corneal tissue is removed and replaced with a thin graft of normal tissue.
- No-stitch pterygium surgery is made possible by the use of modern tissue adhesive composed of clotting proteins normally found in human blood. Tissue adhesive allows the surgeon to secure a conjunctival autograft in seconds rather than minutes. After about one week the tissue adhesive dissolves, leaving no residue and the eye heals comfortably.
- An amniotic membrane will be placed in the eye to aid the healing process and decreases inflammation. Because of its proven ability to prevent scar tissue, it is used to reduce the chance of regrowth after pterygium removal to less than 1%.
- The ASAP™ procedure has endlessly evolved over the years with one of the lowest recurrence rates in the world – 0.06% and with excellent cosmetic results.
In most cases, the ASAP Procedure is performed in less than 15 to 20 minutes and patients leave wearing an eye shield. Within 24 to 48 hours, patients return to most routine activities with minimal restrictions.

**BENEFITS OF THE ASAP PROCEDURE**

- Clearly Different and Backed by Clinical Research
- Best technique - meticulously cultivated over the years
- More comfortable for the patient and little to no pain
- In-office surgical suite with state-of-the-art technology
- Shorter recovery – return to work within 1-2 days after surgery
- Excellent results both clinically and cosmetically
- Reduced risk of pterygium recurring, one of the lowest rates in the world
- Covered by insurance and significant self-pay discount offered

A few things to know about Pterygium surgery or the ASAP Procedure

- The ASAP procedure is performed on an outpatient basis in our state of the art surgical suite located at our N. Bethesda/Rockville office.
- Patients are mildly sedated and receive topical anesthetic drops to eliminate any discomfort during the procedure.
- All surgery carries some risk of infection and/or bleeding, but 99.5% of patients report no serious post-operative complications.
- Pterygium surgery has a quick recovery time and most patients return to normal daily activities in 2 to 3 days.
- Some patients have a pterygium in only one eye. Others may have it in both eyes. If the ASAP Procedure is needed in both eyes, the patient will be scheduled for two separate surgeries, as only one eye is operated on at a time. Pterygium surgery for the second eye is usually performed a few months after the first surgery.
If you feel you would like to have a consult with a surgeon for your pterygium due to symptoms, vision issues and/or the cosmetic appearance of your eyes, here are some essential considerations and question you may wish to ask in order to secure you may receive the best possible surgical treatment and care of your eyes:

1. Find out the experience and skill level of the surgeon performing this type of medical procedure. How many surgeries have they performed? How long has he or she performed this surgery? Is he or she involved in any clinical research to support their outcome data? What kind of results do they deliver? What is their recurrence rate? How does the eye look cosmetically after having the procedure?

2. Ask about the technology available to remove the pterygium? Ask which technique the surgeon uses and how long has he or she had experience in performing this technique? Is he or she constantly looking to perfect the technique to enhance the surgical and cosmetic outcome?

3. Ask about the evaluation process. It’s essential to find a surgeon whose team offers the latest, most thorough testing to evaluate the health of your eye, your vision and how the pterygium may be affecting you. Also, be sure to ask about the post-operative care.

4. Discuss your current health issues and ask whether (and how) they may possibly affect the pterygium surgery.

5. Ask about what kind of outcomes you can expect in terms of the quality of your vision, any symptoms alleviated, likelihood of a recurrence or it coming back and the quality of the appearance of the whites of your eye after healing completely from the surgery.

6. Ask how long it will take your eye to heal.

7. You will need to take some precautions after the surgery so please make certain you understand the exact steps you must take to protect your eye while it is healing and please follow exactly as directed by your surgeon.

8. Returning to work and other activities is important and your surgeon should inform you of the length of your recovery that is necessary in order to work or even drive a car.
Prior to surgery, you will undergo a thorough eye health and vision evaluation. Your exam will include a complete, dilated eye exam. Specific measurements of your eye will be taken. The evaluation will include eye pressure checks, dry eye evaluation, astigmatism evaluation and retina examination. These tests help the surgeon determine if the procedure can be performed or if there may be another condition that needs to be treated in combination with or before your procedure. These tests are typically covered by health insurance.

**MEDICATION**

Please inform your doctor of medications you are taking as your doctor may ask you to avoid taking certain medications beforehand. You will also receive a specific pre-surgery and post-surgery eye drop schedule to follow. It is important to follow the eye drop schedule as prescribed to ensure the best outcome.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Ask a friend or family member to drive you to and from your procedure appointment. Although, pterygium is outpatient surgery, you should not drive afterwards.
WHAT RESULTS CAN YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR PTERYGIUM SURGERY?

Several key factors play a critical role in the results of your pterygium surgery. Getting the right diagnosis, most appropriate treatment and the very best doctor for your individual situation is extremely important. It’s important to find a doctor or surgeon who specializes in the latest procedures and techniques, has proven results and takes time to answer all your questions and closely monitors your progress – before and after surgery.

Talk to your friends for testimonials and research the surgeon online. Check the surgeon’s credentials and memberships and see how comfortable you are with the practice’s staff, the physical environment and ask if he or she and the staff is bilingual to ensure you have the correct information in your preferred language.

While healing time is typically fast and side effects or complications are rare, you should immediately contact your surgeon if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Vision loss or issues
- Pain that continues more than a day after surgery
- Floaters and/or light flashes in front of your eye
- Nausea, excessive coughing or vomiting

Again, these symptoms are extremely rare and are highly treatable, but it’s important to stay in contact with your doctor if you experience them.

RECOVERING FROM SURGERY – WHAT TO EXPECT

Within 48 to 72 hours, patients return to most routine activities with minimal restrictions. Depending on your lifestyle and the type of work you do, your doctor may instruct you to avoid strenuous activities or perform certain movements. Prior to surgery, your surgical team will review all restrictions for after surgery.

To monitor the healing of your eye and to ensure the surgery was successful, your surgeon will ask to see you the day after surgery and your surgical team will let you know any future appointments may be needed.
Love your eyes again!

Should you have any questions, want to learn more or schedule a consultation with Dr. Martinez, please contact us at: 301.896.0890, ext. 123 or email: surgical@voeyedr.com

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