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CANADA'S NATURAL HEALTH
AND WELLNESS MAGAZINE

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Q

I've had pterygium for a while. I am nervous about laser eye treatment to solve the problem. Are there alternative treatments or supplements that may help?

Melina Roberts, ND: Pterygium is a benign, triangular thickening on the outer coating (conjunctiva) of the eye that can grow onto the cornea and affect vision. In advanced cases, pterygium can invade the cornea with the potential of causing astigmatism, corneal scarring, and loss of vision. Symptoms of pterygium include persistent redness, inflammation, foreign body sensation, and/or dry and itchy eyes.

Typically, pterygium does not require surgery unless it grows to such an extent that it obstructs vision or presents with aggravating acute symptoms. When surgery is required, even with modern surgical techniques, the recurrence rate can be as high as 30 to 40 percent, the

regrowth can be rapid, and the size of the recurring pterygium may be larger than before surgery.

Though the exact cause is unknown, pterygium is associated with excessive ultraviolet (UV) light exposure and is characterized by collagen degeneration. Research has shown that the incidence of pterygium is much higher in countries nearer to the equator, with a 36-fold increased risk with intense exposure before the age of five. Such exposure leads to free-radical damage of the tissues.

Antioxidants that protect against free-radical damage are an important prevention and treatment strategy. Potent antioxidants include vitamins A and C. Excellent food sources of these

antioxidants include berries, beans, artichokes, apples, pecans, and plums as well as red grapes and whole grains.

Vitamin A also plays a vital role in the development and maintenance of epithelial tissue, the cells that line or cover body surfaces. Taking vitamin A supplements or pharmaceutical-grade vitamin A eyedrops may be beneficial for preventing and treating pterygium.

Because a deficiency of zinc, vitamin C, protein, or thyroid hormones can impair production of vitamin A, supplementing with zinc and vitamin C, consuming protein, and maintaining healthy thyroid function will help sustain proper vitamin A production, thus helping to promote healthy eyes. **a**



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