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## A 10-minute fix for a 30-year-old eye problem

Among the best prevention suggestions are sunglasses and a hat.



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When I was 13, I had the most nightmarish surgeries you could ever imagine to remove some things called pterygiums from my eyes.

They grew back and I wound up having radiation treatment to kill them. My eyes have been screwed up ever since, and I am still feeling the effects.

There is a new treatment, and my pal and surfing

legend Mickey "the Mongoose" Muñoz, all of 70 years really young, just had it done.

The Mongoose waited more than 30 years to fix a condition in his eyes that was the result of too many days in the surf and sun. He had known for a long time that he had pterygiums (pronounced "tur-ridge-i-ums") but wanted to research the condition and the best possible treatment options before moving forward.

Basically, a pterygium is a thickening of the outer coating of the eye that grows onto the cornea. As it grows, it can become red and irritated and can eventually disrupt normal vision or block vision altogether if not treated.

After a referral by surfer/friend/optometrist Dr. Bill Peterson, Muñoz selected Dr. Edward Kim of Harvard Eye Associates to perform the surgery. They had done more surgeries than any other facility in the area and have an office in San Clemente, which was close to home for Muñoz.

"Everyone is aware of the need for sunscreen on their skin, but more and more research has shown the cumulative damaging effects of sunlight on the eyes," says Dr. John Hovanesian, an eye surgeon with Harvard Eye Associates, a renowned researcher and speaker on pterygiums and other eye diseases. "This UV exposure is especially damaging during water sports with the double assault of the sun coming from above and the reflection coming from below."

Muñoz was well aware of the advancements in pterygium surgeries over the years that resulted in shorter recovery times for patients. Harvard Eye Associates performs dozens of no-stitch surgeries each week that allow most patients to return to work within one or two days of surgery. The older surgical techniques used tiny stitches. These stitches eventually dissolved, but caused quite a bit

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of discomfort in the meantime.

The most recent technique utilizes a special "glue" so no stitches are used.

Dr. Kim explains that the patient is slightly sedated during the pterygium surgery and the eye is completely numbed during the procedure so there is no discomfort. The pterygium is then removed and replaced with a thin graft (autograft) of normal tissue that is glued into place.

This breakthrough allows for the autograft to secure in seconds and the adhesive dissolves in about one week with no residue or discomfort, Dr. Kim said.

"In addition to being more comfortable after surgery, the most compelling reason for this technique is that it greatly reduces the chance for recurrence compared to older techniques," he said.

The final challenge for Muñoz after his surgery a few months ago was to stay out of the water for five weeks during the recovery time (which he didn't quite make). He actually made custom goggles to protect his eyes from the water and resorted to a stand-up surf method so his eyes wouldn't get wet.

While Dr. Kim doesn't advise his patients to push the recovery time, he couldn't help but be impressed with Munoz's creativity and determination to get back into the water.

"Prevention of pterygiums can be helped by using UV filter sunglasses that fit closely, a good hat and avoiding dust, wind and irritants, not so easy sometimes in sunny California," he said.

All and all, Muñoz was pleased with the results of his surgery. He connected immediately with Dr. Kim, who has treated hundreds of patients and plenty of

well-known surfers for this condition.

The entire surgery time from start to finish was about 45 minutes, with the surgery lasting only about 10 minutes.

It took about two to three weeks for the eyes' appearance to return to normal and now just a few months later, his vision has improved dramatically and he's back in the waves.

For more information about the treatments for pterygiums, contact Harvard Eye Associates at 949-951-2020 or visit [www.harvardeye.com](http://www.harvardeye.com).

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