



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the cornea?

The cornea is the eye's outermost layer. It is the clear, dome-shaped surface that covers the front of the eye.

What is corneal blindness?

When the cornea becomes cloudy, light cannot penetrate the eye to reach the light-sensitive retina. Poor vision or blindness may result.

What is a corneal transplant?

A corneal transplant involves replacing a diseased or scarred cornea with a new one.

Is the whole eye transplanted?

No – only the corneas can be transplanted. The entire eye may be used for research and education.

How prevalent and successful is corneal transplantation?

There were 42,642 corneal transplants performed in the U.S. in 2010. Since 1961, more than 700,000 corneal transplants have been performed, restoring sight to men, women, and children ranging in age from nine days to 100+ years.

How successful is corneal transplantation?

Over 95 percent of all corneal transplant operations successfully restore the corneal recipient's vision.

Why should eyes be donated?

There is no substitute for human tissue. The transplantation process depends upon the priceless gift of corneal donation from one human to another. Donated eyes are also needed for research and education.

Who can be a donor?

Anyone can. The great thing about corneal tissue is that everyone is a universal donor. Your blood type does not have to match. It doesn't matter how old you are, what color your eyes are or how good your eyesight is. Aside from those suffering from infections or a few highly communicable diseases such as HIV or hepatitis, most people are suitable donors.

Will the quality of medical treatment be affected if one is a known donor?

No. Strict laws are in existence, which protect the potential donor. Legal guidelines must be followed before death can be certified. The physician certifying a patient's death is not involved with the eye procurement or with the transplant.

Will the recipient be told who donated the corneas?

The gift of sight is made anonymously. Specific information about the donor family is not made available to the recipient. If they so choose, recipients can write anonymously to their donor family, in care of the eye bank, to express their thanks. The eye bank will pass along this communication.

If a person has already signed a donor card, registered as a donor on a driver's license, or signed a registry, how can they be sure that their wishes regarding donation will be respected?

Tell your next of kin. Talk to your family or guardian about donation, and make sure they know your wishes.

Next-of-kin cooperation with a medical/social history interview is required before transplantation, so it is helpful if your family and friends know how you feel about donation.

How great is the need for corneas?

Although more than 42,000 corneal transplants were performed last year, the need for corneal tissue is never satisfied.

Are there religious objections to eye, organ, or tissue donations?

No. Donation is an opportunity to help save a life or restore someone's sight. Eye, organ, and tissue donation are consistent with the beliefs of major religions. Include your spiritual leader in your decision-making process.

Is there a fee charged for this donation?

No. It is illegal to buy or sell human eyes, organs and tissue. Any cost associated with eye procurement is absorbed by the eye bank placing the tissue.

Is there any delay in funeral arrangements?

No. Eye tissue procurement is performed within hours of death. Families may proceed with funeral arrangements without delay or interruption.

Will eye donation affect the appearance of the donor?

No. Great care is taken to preserve the donor's appearance. The donor's body is treated with respect at all times. Funeral arrangements, including a viewing, if desired, may proceed as scheduled.

How soon after a donation must a cornea be transplanted?

Recovery of the donor eye tissue takes place within hours of death. A corneal transplant is performed within 3-5 days after donation and depends on medical issues.

What happens if corneas are not suitable for transplant?

Some medical conditions pose a problem for transplantation and a hazard for medical personnel. An extensive review of the donor's medical, family and social history is conducted, as well as detailed examinations of the donor eyes and corneas. Some donated eyes are rejected as unsuitable for transplantation; however, efforts are made to place this tissue with research and educational programs when and where appropriate.

How do research and education benefit from eye donation?

Research on glaucoma, retinal disease, eye complications of diabetes and other sight disorders helps to advance the discovery of the cause and effects of these conditions. This can then lead to new treatments and cures.

What is an eye bank?

An eye bank is a non-profit organization that obtains, medically evaluates and distributes eyes donated by caring individuals for use in corneal transplantation, research, and education. U.S. eye banks provide tissue for about 59,000 corneal transplants a year.

How does the eye bank ensure safe corneal tissue for transplantation?

The donated eyes and the donor's medical and social history are evaluated by the eye bank in accordance with the Eye Bank Association of America's (EBAA) strict Medical Standards, as well as with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations. In addition to these standards for evaluating safety of donors and donor tissues, the EBAA also provides standards for eye banks to use in training personnel to evaluate donor eyes.

With the recipient's safety in mind, only corneas that have met strict evaluation guidelines set forth by the EBAA and FDA are distributed.

Why are the families of potential donors asked so quickly if they would like to donate? Can't the question be asked at a later time?

We understand that losing a loved one is a most stressful and sorrowful time; however, to ensure that healthy cells in the cornea remain viable, the recovery must take place as soon as possible. The time limit for recovery of just a few hours is recommended. Most families are also comforted in knowing that out of something so tragic, a wonderful and selfless act may result.