



Eye donation for corneal transplant

Information for patients from Ophthalmology

Coming to terms with a bereavement is hard; but the idea that our death may help others can be comforting. This leaflet:

- explains what eye donation is, and
- answers some of the questions we are most frequently asked.

We hope it will help you to reach a decision.

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 the next. Donated human eyes and corneal tissue are used for research, education, and transplantation.

What is corneal tissue?

The cornea is the clear tissue covering the front of the eye. It is the main focusing element of the eye. Vision will be dramatically reduced if the cornea becomes cloudy from disease, injury, or infection.

What is corneal blindness?

Corneal blindness happens when a person's cornea becomes clouded. This can make them blind, or at best severely limit their vision.

What is a corneal transplant?

Corneal transplant is a surgical procedure. It replaces a disc shaped segment of an impaired cornea with a similarly shaped piece of healthy donor cornea.

Is the whole eye transplanted?

No, only the cornea can be transplanted.

The sclera is the tough, white fibrous protective outer layer of the eye. This may be used in other types of eye surgery. The entire eye may be used in research and education.

How common is corneal transplantation?

Corneal grafting was pioneered in the UK in the 1930s. Technical advances over the last 30 years have made this one of the most frequently performed human transplant procedures. There are over 3600 sight saving corneal transplants carried out each year.

How successful is corneal transplantation?

Over 96% (or 96 in every 100) of all corneal transplant operations successfully restore the corneal recipient's sight.

How do research and education benefit from eye donation?

Research helps to advance the discovery of the cause and effect of the following eye conditions.

- glaucoma
- retinal disease
- diabetic complications of the eye, and
- other sight disorders.

Who can be a donor?

Most people can be a donor. There are a few exceptions though (see below). The specialist nurse organ donation / tissue co-ordinator will advise you. There is no age limit. Cataracts, poor eyesight, or age do not prevent you from being a donor.

It is important that your family know your wishes.

Are there any reasons why I cannot be a donor?

Yes.

- Where death is of unknown infection.
- Where there is the presence of infectious eye disease.
- Where there is scarring or damage to the cornea.
- Where the donor has undergone corrective laser surgery to improve sight.
- Alzheimer's Disease.

- Other diseases of unknown cause.

How great is the need for corneas?

There are never enough corneas in the eye bank. Artificial tissue has been tried but has so far been unsuccessful.

There is a great shortage of donor corneas in the UK. The waiting time can be up to one year.

What is an eye bank?

Any eye bank obtains, medically evaluates, and distributes eyes for use in corneal transplantation.

Corneas from donors all over the UK are stored in the Corneal Transplant Service eye banks in Bristol and Manchester where they can be kept for up to four weeks.

The corneas are distributed through NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), the NHS organ matching and distribution service.

Are there any religious objections to eye, organ, or tissue donation?

No. Donation is a chance to help save a life or restore someone's sight. Eye, organ, and tissue donation is consistent with the beliefs and attitudes of most major religions.

Will donating delay funeral arrangements?

No. Eye retrieval will not interfere with funeral arrangements, last offices, and family viewings.

Will eye donation affect the appearance of the donor?

No. Great care is taken to preserve the donor's appearance.

What happens if the corneas are not suitable for transplant?

Donor eyes are carefully evaluated. Corneas that are unsuitable for transplant may be used in ethically approved research, but only if permission / consent was obtained.

Will the recipient be told who donated the cornea?

The gift of sight is made anonymously. Specific information about the donor family is not available to the recipient. The eye bank will always convey recipient's thanks to the donor family.

If you have a donor card, how do you know that your wishes will be respected?

Tell your family and friends.

What happens when the referral has been made?

The family of the donor is asked to sign a 'lack of objection' form (consent form) stating their wishes. To ensure the safety of the recipient, the donor's medical and social history is reviewed.

A small blood sample (10mls) is taken to screen for viruses that may prevent donation. This can be taken after the patient has died.

Further information

Further information is available from the following organisations.

- **Tissue Service**
Telephone: 08004 320559 (freephone)
This is a pager service and they will call back within 20 minutes.
- **British Organ Donor Society**
Telephone: 01233 893636
- **National Association of Bereavement Services**
Telephone: 0207 247 1080
- **Child Death Helpline**
Telephone: 0800 282986 (freephone)
Open every evening 7pm to 10pm, and Wednesday 10am to 1pm.

References

- NHS Blood and Transplant: What is cornea donation? (<https://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/helping-you-to-decide/about-organ-donation/what-can-you-donate/about-cornea-donation/>)
- NHS Blood and Transplant: What is organ donation? (<https://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/helping-you-to-decide/about-organ-donation/faq/>)

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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