

Information for Patients on Corneal Transplantation

A **corneal transplant** is also known as a **corneal graft**

What is a corneal graft?

The cornea is the curved window at the front of the eye that must be clear to enable us to see. It is in front of the iris (the coloured part of the eye) and the pupil (the round black hole in the centre of the coloured part) (see Figs. 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Front view of the right eye

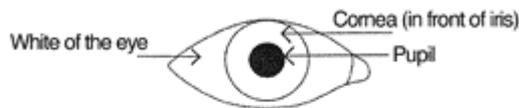
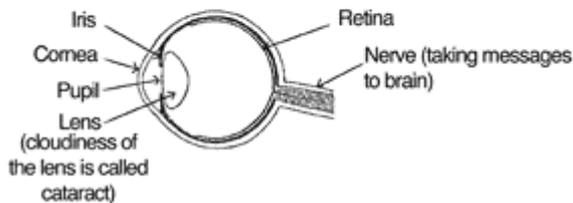


Figure 2: Side view of the eye

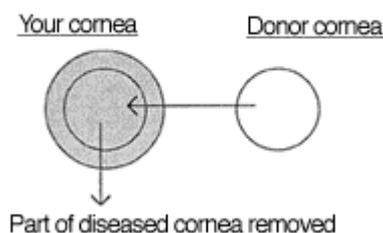


If the cornea is hazy, so that you can no longer see through it, a corneal graft may be appropriate. The corneal graft is taken from the healthy eye of a person who has died (where permission has been given by the deceased prior to death, or more usually by the family).

What actually takes place during the operation?

A circular portion is removed from the centre of your cornea. A similar circular portion is then taken from the centre of the donor cornea (this is the corneal graft) and it is placed into the hole in your cornea and sutured into place with very fine stitches (Fig 3).

Figure 3: Transfer of Donor Graft to Recipient



You will now have a new corneal graft replacing the central part of your cornea (Fig 4).

Figure 4: Corneal Graft with sutures (which can only be seen with a microscope)



What happens to the part of my cornea which is removed?

Most corneas are examined under a microscope for further information. Some tissue may be kept for research into corneal disease.

Will I be asleep for the operation?

The operation can be done either with you asleep (general anaesthetic) or when the eye has been numbed by injection (local anaesthetic). Your surgeon will discuss these options with you.

How long does the procedure take?

A routine corneal graft operation usually takes about an hour. If any other surgery is planned, such as cataract surgery, then it may take longer. This is only a guide as each patient is different.

How long will I be in hospital?

Usually you will be admitted the day before surgery and can go home the day after. Occasionally it may be necessary to keep patients in for a little longer to allow the eye to settle further.

What will it feel like the day after surgery?

Your eye may feel irritable and some discomfort is expected (which should settle within a few days). Significant pain is not common so if your eye is painful then you should contact the eye hospital.

Will I need drops after the operation?

Drops are put in frequently for the first few days; later they are used less frequently but for many months.

How often will I need to be seen in outpatients after the operation?

Your first visit is usually within one week after leaving hospital. We then increase the period between visits, often to four weeks, then two months etc. Again this will depend on each individual. You can expect to be seen at least six times in the first year.

Is there anything I should avoid after the operation?

You should plan to take up to a month off work. Swimming should be avoided for at least a month and you should never do contact sports eg rugby, football, boxing etc. Otherwise try to live as normally as possible.

Could I catch any disease from the transplant?

The medical history of the donor is checked to exclude the following conditions: rabies, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) and diseases of the nervous system of unknown cause. Blood is taken from all donors to exclude hepatitis B, hepatitis C and the AIDS virus. While the cornea is in the Eye Bank it is very carefully examined to reduce the risk of infection with bacteria and fungi; as a result of these checks the risk is tiny. However, because of this tiny risk, once you have had a corneal transplant you will not be able to be a blood or organ donor.

How good will the vision be eventually?

This will depend on the particular features of your eye but your vision will not be perfect in the operated eye. How much you depend on this eye will be influenced by how good the other eye is.

When will I notice any improvement in my vision?

Each person varies in their response to the operation. Some notice a big improvement early on whereas in others the vision will improve gradually over several months.

Will I need glasses afterwards?

In some cases it is possible to see quite clearly without glasses. However, most people usually require glasses or contact lenses - how long after your operation these are organised depends on a number of things including when the stitches are removed.

What problems should I seek advice about?

Graft rejection is our main concern. This rejection results from your immune system recognising the graft as being "foreign". If you experience any **Redness**, **Sensitivity** to light, disturbance of **Vision**, or **Pain (RSVP)** please contact our Acute Referral Centre as soon as possible (Tel. 0161 276 5598). **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENT.** If you have any queries about your eye there will always be someone available to help

NB. Because each patient is different the above information is a general guide only. Remember your operation is the beginning of a course of treatment, not the end of it!

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