

## Corneal transplantation and donation

The cornea is the clear dome-like surface at the front of the eye and is the main focusing element. If a cornea becomes cloudy from disease, injury or infection, vision is dramatically reduced. A corneal transplant is the surgical procedure which replaces a disc-shaped segment of an unhealthy cornea with a similarly shaped piece of healthy donor cornea. Only human donor tissue can be used in corneal transplantation surgery.

### Conditions that require a corneal transplant

The two most common reasons for requiring a transplant are bullous keratopathy and keratoconus. Other reasons include eye injury, herpes virus infection of the eye, corneal scarring due to trauma, hereditary or congenital corneal clouding, or severe bacterial infection.

### Corneal transplantation is a common procedure

In Australia, approximately 1,700 corneal transplants are performed each year. Except for blood transfusion, corneal transplants are the oldest and most common form of human transplantation.

### Becoming an eye donor

Almost anyone can be an eye donor. Unlike organ donation, age and blood type does not affect donor suitability. Similarly, donor eye colour and eye sight are not barriers to donation.

Telling your next of kin about your wishes is crucial to become an eye donor at the time of your death. Individuals can also register with the Australian Organ Donor Registry.

### Success rate of corneal transplantation

More than 90 per cent of cornea transplant operations are successful. According to the Australian Corneal Graft Registry, the average one year transplant survival is 91.2 per cent, decreasing to 80 per cent at four years.

### Putting donated eyes to use

An eye bank is notified when a potential donor who meets preliminary donation criteria passes away. Retrieval of the cornea typically occurs within 12 hours of death. If a donor cornea is unsuitable for transplant, eyes may be used for research and training.

### Where to get help

- Your ophthalmologist
- Australian Organ Donor Registry Tel. 1800 645 899
- Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital Tel. (03) 9929 8666.

### Things to remember

- Corneal transplants replace the 'window of the eye' if it is diseased or damaged.
- Only corneas, not eyes, can be transplanted.
- Only human donor tissue can be used in corneal transplantation surgery.
- If you wish to be an eye donor after your death, tell your family.

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