

Fact sheet: Corneal donation and transplantation



What is a cornea?

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.

What is corneal transplantation?

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.

What conditions 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.

Is corneal transplantation a common procedure?

In Australia, approximately 1700 corneal transplants are performed each year. Except for blood transfusion, corneal transplants are the oldest and most common form of human transplantation.

Who can become 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.

How do I become an eye donor?

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. Visit <http://www.donatelife.gov.au/> for information.

What is the 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.

What happens to a donor eye?

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

About the Lions Eye Donation Service

The Lions Eye Donation Service provides donor corneas to patients who have sight-threatening conditions and require a corneal transplant. Generously supported by the Lions Clubs International, the Service collects, medically evaluates and distributes donor eyes for use in transplantation across Australia and New Zealand.

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