

Corneal donation

Surgeons transplant donated corneas, the clear front section of the eye, to save the sight of their patients. For someone facing blindness, a donated cornea can improve or restore their vision allowing them to resume a normal life.

Donation is an act of great compassion and generosity, and it leaves a profound legacy. Although donation takes place at a time of sadness and loss we hope some comfort may be found in knowing that it is an extraordinary gift, which could provide others with the chance to reclaim a full and vibrant life through the gift of sight.

What is a corneal transplant?

The cornea is the eye's outermost layer. It is the clear, dome-shaped surface found at the front of the eye. It functions like a window, allowing light to pass through the eye. A corneal transplant is a surgical procedure that replaces a diseased or scarred cornea with a healthy, donated cornea. Corneal transplantation is the most frequently performed transplant procedure.

Who can donate?

Many people can donate; all people should consider themselves potential eye donors. Even if your eyesight is poor, your corneal tissue may be completely healthy – healthy enough to save someone's sight. The questions we will ask will determine if donation can take place. The wonderful thing about corneal tissue is that everyone is a universal donor. There is no substitute for human tissue.

What consent is needed to donate?

Consent to donate can be given by registering with the Organ Donation Registry or by making known ones wish to donate before dying. An appointed nominated representative can also convey someone's wish to donate. If prior consent has been given we can help to honour this wish.

If prior consent to donate has not been given, family or friends may still be able to consent on behalf of their loved one unless there was a clear wish in life for donation not to take place.

The best way to ensure that the correct decision is made is to discuss donation with family and friends. We also encourage you to approach the medical staff if you would like to donate your or your loved ones' corneas.

In addition to confirming consent, our Eye Bank staff will work with family and friends to complete questions about a donor's medical and social history in order to ensure the safety and suitability of eyes for transplant. A blood sample will also be taken from the donor at the time of eye collection which will be tested for the presence of infectious diseases.

What is donated?

Whole eyes are donated, from which the cornea is removed. Only the corneas can be transplanted. If after examination the cornea is not suitable for transplant, the entire eye may be used for research and training, if consent has been given.

Will 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 dignity and respect at all times. Funeral arrangements, including a viewing, if desired, may proceed as scheduled.

Is there a time limit for donation?

Yes; In order to ensure that the cells in donated corneas remain healthy, collection of eyes must take place within 24 hours after death. We understand that donation takes place at a difficult time for relatives and friends and will endeavour to take up as little time as possible when taking consent and obtaining medical information.

Is there a cost to the family?

No; donor families do not incur any costs related to donation.

Does donation affect funeral arrangements?

No; families may proceed with funeral arrangements without delay or interruption.

Are there any religious objections to donation?

Most major religions approve of eye, organ and tissue donation, and consider donation an act of charity.

What is an Eye Bank?

An Eye Bank is an organisation committed to aiding the restoration of sight through collection, medical evaluation, storage and distribution of donated corneas. The corneas are used either for corneal transplantation or for research and training. We can only store corneas for a few weeks so we need a constant supply of new corneas in order to provide surgeons with transplant material at all times.

Who we are:

We are an NHS organisation and part of Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. We were the first Eye Bank in the United Kingdom, established in 1952, as a result of the pioneering work of Sir Archibald McIndoe and Sir Benjamin Rycroft in treating injured airmen during the Second World War. We remain at the forefront of sight restoration and preservation through transplantation, research and education.

How to contact us for donation:

We are based in the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead and cover the entire Southeast of England. Our coordinators are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you would like to discuss corneal donation, please contact us directly on 01342 414220 (Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm).

For donation please call our 24 hr. number:-
07712 305268

Contact Details

East Grinstead Eye Bank
Queen Victoria Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust
Holtye Road
East Grinstead
West Sussex
RH19 3DZ

Telephone: 01342 414220
Mobile: 07712 305268
Fax: 01342 414025
www.qvh.nhs.uk/our-services/eye-bank

Eye donation: A guide to the gift of sight



**Please ask if you
would like this leaflet
in larger print or a
different format.**

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