



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the cornea?

The cornea is the eye's outermost layer. It is the clear, dome-shaped surface that covers the front of the eye.

What is corneal blindness?

When the cornea becomes cloudy, light cannot penetrate the eye to reach the light-sensitive retina. Poor vision or blindness may result.

Is the whole eye transplanted?

No – only the corneas can be transplanted. The entire eye may be used for research and education.

How prevalent is corneal transplantation?

There were 47,173 corneal transplants performed in the U.S. in 2015, which represents 100% of the demand for corneas. Globally, corneal diseases result in blindness or visual impairment in over ten million people. Since 1961, more than 1,500,000 men, women, and children have had their sight restored through the work of EBAA members.

How successful is corneal transplantation?

Over 95% of all corneal transplant operations successfully restore the corneal recipient's vision.

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 another. Donated eyes are also needed for research and education.

Who can be a donor?

Anyone can. The great thing about corneal tissue is that everyone is a universal donor. Your blood type does not have to match. It doesn't matter how old you are, what color your eyes are or how good your eyesight is. Aside from those suffering from infections or a few highly communicable diseases such as HIV or hepatitis, most people are suitable donors.

Will the quality of medical treatment be affected if one is a known donor?

No. Strict laws protect the potential donor. Legal guidelines must be followed before death can be certified. The physician certifying a patient's death is not involved with the eye procurement or with the transplant.

If a person has already signed a donor card, a driver's license, or signed a registry, how can they be sure that their wishes regarding donation will be respected?

Tell your next of kin. Talk to your family or guardian about donation, and make sure they know your wishes. Next-of-kin cooperation with a medical/social history interview is required before transplantation, so it is helpful if your family and friends know how you feel about donation.

Are there religious objections to eye, organ, or tissue donations?

No. Donation is an opportunity to help save a life or restore someone's sight. Eye, organ, and tissue donation are consistent with the beliefs of major religions. Include your spiritual leader in your decision-making process.

Is a fee charged for donation?

No. It is illegal to buy or sell human eyes, organs and tissue. Any cost associated with eye procurement is absorbed by the eye bank placing the tissue.

Is there any delay in funeral arrangements?

No. Eye tissue procurement is performed within hours of death. Families may proceed with funeral arrangements without delay or interruption.

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

How soon after a donation must a cornea be transplanted?

Recovery of the donor eye tissue typically takes place within 12 hours of death. Corneal storage media used in the U.S. will keep the tissue viable for up to 14 days after death, but most corneas are transplanted within one week of recovery.

Will the recipient be told who donated the corneas?

The gift of sight is made anonymously. Specific information about the donor family is not made available to the recipient. However, recipients often wish to express their appreciation to their donor's family. In those cases, the eye bank will pass along notes or cards from the recipient.

What happens if corneas are not suitable for transplant?

Some medical conditions pose a problem for transplantation and a hazard for medical personnel. An extensive review of the donor's medical, family and social history is conducted, as well as detailed examinations of the donor eyes and corneas. Some donated eyes are rejected as unsuitable for transplantation; whenever possible these tissues are used for research and educational programs.

How do research and education benefit from eye donation?

Research on glaucoma, retinal disease, eye complications of diabetes and other sight disorders helps to advance the discovery of the cause and effects of these conditions. This can then lead to new treatments and cures.

How does the eye bank ensure safe corneal tissue for transplantation?

The donated eyes and the donor's medical and social history are evaluated by the eye bank in accordance with the Eye Bank Association of America's (EBAA) strict Medical Standards, as well as with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations.

In addition to these standards for evaluating safety of donors and donor tissues, the EBAA also provides standards for eye banks to use in training personnel to evaluate donor eyes. With the recipient's safety in mind, only corneas that have met strict evaluation guidelines set forth by the EBAA and FDA are distributed.