

Columbus Ophthalmology Associates
CORNEAL TRANSPLANT

What is the cornea?

The cornea is the clear front window of the eye which covers the iris and pupil. It acts much like the crystal that covers the face of a watch.

Corneal injury or disease can cause clouding, scarring and distortion of the clear window and block light from entering the eye. If the cornea becomes cloudy, and cannot be treated medically, the only way to restore vision is to replace or transplant the cornea. A corneal transplant is the most successful of all organ transplants.

What is a corneal transplant?

Over 40,000 corneal transplants are done each year in the United States. Their success depends largely on the cause of the clouding. For example, the success of the corneal transplant is very low for those who have suffered severe chemical injuries. Certain types of viral infections can also cause ulceration and have a lower success rate than others. Patients, who have a transplant for disorders such as keratoconus and corneal dystrophies, have a higher success rate.

The tissue used in a corneal transplant comes from an Eye Bank. A donor eye will be given to the eye bank where names are kept on file for patients needing transplants. This donor cornea will be transferred during surgery to the central portion of the patient's eye after the diseased area is removed.

Surgical recovery may take up to a year after the operation and depends on the rate of healing and health of the eye. As with other types of transplants, rejection of the donor tissue is possible. Signs of rejection include redness of the eye or worsening vision. In addition, the cornea is very vulnerable to injury after surgery and protection must be worn at all times. There are multiple stitches used for the corneal transplant that will likely need to be removed in the office during the recovery period. Finally, irregular astigmatism can occur, and in some cases a contact lens may be necessary to improve vision.

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