



Corneal Transplant

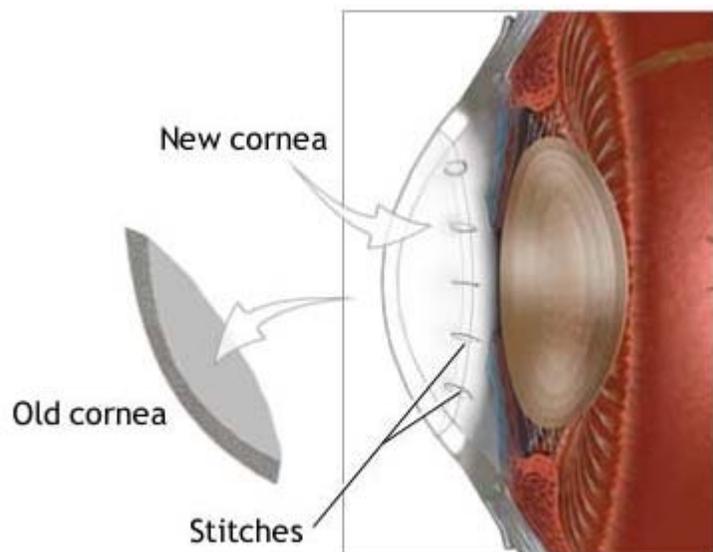
The cornea is like the front window of the eye. That window must stay clear, like glass, to aid you in having good vision. If the cornea becomes cloudy for any reason, vision is decreased. But in many cases vision can be restored with an operation called a corneal transplant. Corneal transplant surgery is the most successful of all tissue transplant operations.

There are many causes of corneal clouding:

- Eye injuries from sharp objects, burns, explosions, or chemical splashes can leave a dense white scar on the cornea.
- A severe infection of the cornea with bacteria, fungus, or certain viruses like the herpes virus can lead to corneal scarring.
- Sometimes the cornea gradually develops an abnormal shape called keratoconus. This can scar the center of the cornea or distort vision to the point where glasses or contact lenses won't help.
- Corneal clouding can be caused by age-related degeneration of the cornea, diseases of the cornea, or eye surgeries.

Corneas for transplantation come from donors. An eye bank examines, protects, and stores the donated tissue. Before a donated cornea is sowed in a transplant operation, it is tested extensively. The eye bank also screens donated corneas for the presence of viruses like hepatitis and HIV.

Many people hear the word transplant and think their whole eye will be replaced. But only the central part of the cornea is replaced during surgery. A corneal transplant is performed under local anesthetic as an out patient procedure. During the operation the center of the cloudy cornea is removed and the clear center of a donated cornea is sewn into its place. These stitches can be left in place indefinitely or may need to be removed at a later date in time.



--TURN OVER--

Your eye is patched overnight and examined the next day. There is usually mild if any discomfort after surgery, and you can usually resume most of your normal activities soon after. You will use eye drops several times a day for at least several weeks and maybe even longer. The drops help prevent infection and rejection of the transplanted cornea.

After the corneal transplant surgery it takes time for good vision to return. Glasses or contact lenses are usually prescribed once the shape of the healing cornea has stabilized.

As with any operation, there are risks. A possible complication after corneal transplant surgery is rejection of the transplanted tissue. Pain, redness, and decreasing vision can be signs of rejection and require immediate attention. Use of steroid drops can sometimes reverse rejection if it's detected early. If rejection cannot be reversed, the transplanted cornea becomes cloudy, leaving vision blurred. Repeat transplants can often be attempted.

While there are other complications, they are rare and many are treatable. But there is always the small risk that vision could be permanently damaged or lost. Among the potential complications are bleeding, infection, scarring, glaucoma, retinal swelling, retinal detachment, cataract, and swelling within the donated cornea known as graft failure.