Corneal Transplants

What You Need to Know About Surgery, FAQ, Risks & Benefits

The cornea is the clear dome at the front of your eye. It focuses light rays on your retina allowing you to see. The cornea has five layers which can become swollen, cloudy, or out of shape.

Once these symptoms progress to the point where vision is affected, the diseased cornea may be removed and replace with donor tissue. This procedure is called a corneal transplant.

Types of Corneal Transplants

- **Penetrating Keratoplasty (PK)** - PK is a full thickness corneal transplant. The central portion of the cornea is removed and replaced with donated tissue. PK corrects problems with the cornea’s shape, opacities or scars.

- **Descemet’s Stripping Endothelial Keratoplasty (DSEK)** - DSEK is a new type of corneal transplant where only the back layer of the cornea (endothelium) is removed and replaced with donated tissue. This is done to correct conditions like Fuch’s Endothelial Dystrophy, where the back layer has suffered loss of cells and does not function properly.

- **Deep Anterior Lamellar Keratoplasty (DALK)** - This surgery is a partial thickness of the cornea is removed but the back layer is left in place. DALK corrects problems with the cornea’s shape and/or opacity of the front layer. DALK is often done for keratoconus.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I be asleep for the surgery? Your eye will be numbed and you will be awake under local anesthesia. However, you will receive an IV medication to keep you sleepy and relaxed.

How long does the surgery take? The transplant surgery takes about 30 minutes to an hour.

When can I go back to work and resume normal activity? Patients usually return to full activity one week after DSEK surgery and six weeks after PK or DALK.

Where does the donor tissue come from? The corneal tissue comes from eye banks. The tissue has been donated by someone who is deceased.

Risks & Benefits

The benefit, of course, is improved vision. However there are always risks with any type of surgery. Your individual risks will be discussed at the time of your evaluation.

John W. French, M.D. and the Cornea and External Diseases Service is dedicated to excellence in medical and surgical care covering the complete spectrum of conditions involving the cornea and other structures at the front of the eye, including dystrophies, infections, corneal swelling, dry eyes and trauma.

For more information call (910) 295-2100 or toll-free at (800) 733-9355.