

Corneal and tissue donation

Information for patients and carers



*because
you matter*

**St Nicholas
Hospice Care**

A Registered Charity No. 287773



Need to talk?

01284 766133

stnicholashospicecare.org.uk

Corneal and tissue donation

This leaflet explains about cornea and tissue donation, and how the donation of a cornea or other tissue can help change lives.

1 **Corneal donation:** giving someone the gift of sight

At St Nicholas Hospice Care, we know that organ or tissue donation can help patients and families feel comforted by knowing they have given hope to others and that some good has come out of their loss. However, we also realise that not everyone feels comfortable with taking such a step.

If you are reading this leaflet you may be thinking about organ or tissue donation, but might be unsure whether this is possible for you or what is involved.

Here are some facts that may help you make up your mind:

- The cornea is the clear front window of the eye
- The donation of one cornea could help up to four people to have their sight restored or improved
- Corneal transplant is a successful sight-saving operation with 93% of transplanted corneas working after 1 year and 74% still working after 5 years
- Both old and young patients can benefit. The youngest patient to receive a cornea transplant was a few days old and the oldest was 104
- There is a shortage of over 500 corneas each year in the UK and the waiting list to receive a cornea transplant is currently 2 years. Many more people would benefit from a sight-saving transplant if more corneas were donated.

2 Referral for corneal donation

Most people, apart from the very elderly can be considered as a tissue donor, including people with cancer. It does not matter if you have poor eyesight.

Some people can't donate, such as people with blood borne viruses, conditions such as dementia, other neurological conditions, leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma, and those who have had laser eye surgery. If you are uncertain whether or not you would be eligible a member of our staff will be happy to discuss this further with you.

- If you decide you wish to go ahead, a consent form can be signed (although there is no legal requirement to do so)
- After your death a specialist nurse will contact your next of kin to obtain further information about your medical history and gain their consent before the donation goes ahead
- The removal of corneas can be done at the hospice or the funeral directors, up to 24 hours after death, and is carried out with the same care and respect as any other procedure. It does not prevent relatives saying goodbye or affect funeral arrangements.
- Throughout the donation process the donor is treated with respect and dignity. After donation care is taken to maintain the donor's natural appearance and relatives may visit their loved one after they have donated and before they are laid to rest.



3 What do I need to do if I wish to donate my corneas?

- Tell your closest family and friends about your decision
- You can join the Organ Donor Register by calling **0300 123 23 23** or online at **www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/tissuedonation**
- After you have died, one of our staff or your next of kin will need to contact Tissue Services via their 24hr message pager. The specialist nurse in tissue donation will return the call. Tel: **0800 432 0559**

4 What other tissue can be donated?

People who are dying from conditions other than cancer may be able to donate other tissue:

- **Bone** can be used to help improve and restore mobility and can prevent limb amputation in bone cancer patients
- **Heart valves** can be transplanted to save the lives of patients suffering from diseased or damaged valves, and young children born with malformed hearts
- **Skin** can help to save the lives of people with severe burns, as a skin graft helps to reduce pain, reduces infections and prepares underlying tissue for later treatment
- **Tendons** can be used to restore mobility in patients with badly damaged knee joints

Referrals and consent are the same as for corneal donation. However, unlike corneal donation, these tissues cannot be removed at the Hospice and your body would need to be transferred to a local hospital mortuary to enable retrieval of the donated tissue within 48 hours.

If you have any questions that aren't answered in this leaflet, we hope you will talk them over with a member of staff who will be glad to help.

Other sources for further information include NHS Blood and Transplant online at: www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/tissuedonation

Or call a nurse from the NHS Blood and Transplant National Referral Centre on: **0800 432 0559 (freephone)**

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This leaflet is available in different formats upon request.
Please contact the Marketing and Communications
Department for further information on 01284 715584.

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