

# Having stitches removed after a full or partial thickness cornea transplant

Ophthalmology Department

Information for Patients

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## What are corneal stitches (sutures)?

You have had a corneal graft. The stitches (sutures) are used to keep the graft tissue in place on the eye. These are not dissolving stitches, so will need to be taken out.

The exact timing of stitches being taken out varies greatly between patients. It has to be decided on an individual basis by your doctor.

In some patients, it becomes clear after the surgery that the stitches are causing distortion of the cornea (astigmatism). This may affect the quality of vision. We may have to adjust or take out the stitches sooner. Adjustment may be done in the clinic or in the operating theatre, depending on the patient.

## How soon can you have the stitches removed?

After a full-thickness corneal transplant (penetrating keratoplasty) all the remaining stitches will be removed between 18 to 24 months after surgery.

If you have had a partial thickness corneal transplant (endothelial keratoplasty) the stitches are usually removed between 2 to 4 months after surgery.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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## **What happens when the stitches are taken out?**

- This is usually done under local anaesthetic while you are awake.
- The eye is numbed with eye drops and the eyelids are held open with a clip.
- The doctor will remove the stitch 1 by 1.
- The length of the surgery varies depending on how many sutures are removed, but usually takes 45 minutes to 1 hour.

## **What are the benefits?**

Having the stitches removed helps to prevent infection, and reduces the risk of the corneal graft rejecting. It also helps with keeping your vision stable as the corneal shape can change if sutures break. After removing all the stitches around half (50%) of patients will need spectacles or contact lens for the best corrected vision.

## **What are the risks involved in taking out the stitches?**

- Infection - this can be from within the eye or from the stitch removed.
- Wound leak - would need to put stitch again where the doctor removed the stitch.
- Scarring - irregularity of the cornea where the stitch was removed from.
- Corneal graft rejection - to reduce this, continue with steroid drops as per advice.

## **What should I do after the procedure?**

- Do not use tap water in the eye for 2 weeks after your surgery. Instead, use cooled boiled water.
- If you have had a full thickness graft, avoid heavy lifting and prolonged bending for 1 month after the suture removal.
- If you have had a partial thickness graft, you will be able to resume your normal activities after 2 to 3 days.
- You will be given an antibiotic drop/ointment to use in the operated eye for 1 to 2 weeks after your surgery. You will be told how often you should use the drops when you are discharged.

- You will also need to continue with any existing eye drops you may already use (such as steroid drops, glaucoma drops) unless you have been told to stop by your doctor/nurse.
- Please do not rub your operated eye as this can cause damage to the operated eye.
- You will be seen in clinic around 4 weeks after the stitches have been taken out, to check everything is healing well.
- After the stitches are taken out, around 50% of patients will need spectacles or contact lens for best vision. Please ask your doctor/nurse for advice before going to the opticians.

## What should I look out for?

Please contact us via the numbers below or go to Eye Casualty if you have:

- increased redness
- pain
- loss of vision
- an increased sensitivity to light

## Contact details

If you have any concerns you can contact us on the following:

Corneal Specialist Nurse: 07970940125, Monday to Friday - 9am to 5pm

Eye Casualty: 0116 258 6273, Monday to Friday - 8.30am to 4.30pm  
and weekends - 8:30am to 12:30pm.

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