

# Fuchs' Dystrophy

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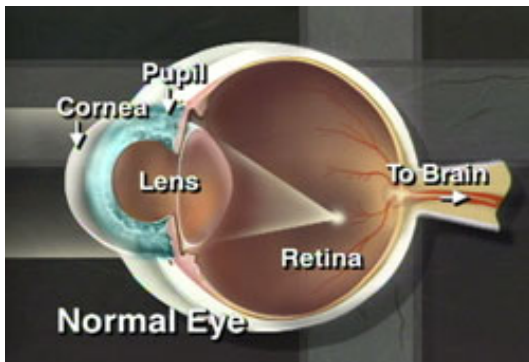
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## Overview

Fuchs' (pronounced Fooks) dystrophy is an inherited eye condition that damages the cornea later in life, usually after age 50. The cornea, which is the outer portion of the eye, must maintain its clarity for vision to remain normal. In order to stay clear, the



cornea retains a certain percentage of fluid. However, if it retains too much fluid, vision can become hazy. To prevent this from happening, a layer of cells called the **endothelium** pumps excess fluid out of the cornea. Fuchs' dystrophy damages these cells. Once enough of these pump cells are damaged, fluid builds up, causing the cornea to swell and your vision to blur.

## Symptoms

- **Blurred vision.** In the early stages of Fuchs' dystrophy, you may notice that blurring is worse in the morning because the cornea retains fluid during sleep and swells (edema). However, vision may get clearer by the afternoon as fluid evaporates in the tear film while the eye is open during the day. As the condition progresses, however, vision may take longer to clear and may remain blurred all day.
- **Light sensitivity.** You may notice increased sensitivity to light. Some patients, for example, report problems with driving at night because of glare from car headlights.
- **Pain.** When the condition is advanced, the eye can become very painful and require urgent treatment.

## Screening

We will review your symptoms, medical history and family history before performing a comprehensive eye exam. During the exam we use a 'slit lamp' microscope to look for swelling in the cornea that indicates Fuchs' dystrophy.

## Causes

We know that Fuchs' dystrophy is an inherited disorder but scientists have not yet discovered what causes the condition.

## Medication

If your condition is at an early stage, we will usually prescribe hypertonic saline eye drops that suck excess fluid out of the cornea. However, as the condition progresses, we may recommend a surgical approach.

## Surgical Treatment Options

### *Full corneal transplant*

Currently, a corneal transplant is the most commonly performed surgery for treating advanced Fuchs' dystrophy. During the procedure we remove the damaged cornea and replace it with a donated cornea. After a period of time, your vision will usually improve.

### *Descemet's Stripping Automated Endothelial Keratectomy (DSAEK)*

DSAEK is a new, modified corneal transplant procedure in which only the damaged part of the cornea is replaced. This procedure offers a quicker recovery time and better vision with glasses compared to the standard corneal transplant. We have surgeons who specialize in this type of cornea surgery at most Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers. If you are a candidate for this procedure we will refer you to one of these specialists.

## Living with the condition

We may be able to manage your symptoms for a number of years just with eye drops. We will tell you exactly how to use these. If you have difficulty using the drops or are experiencing any change in your vision or other symptoms, let us know.

In some cases we may recommend that you use a hair dryer to help evaporate excess fluid from your eyes. Hold a warm hair dryer at arm's length and direct the air flow across your face. This can be done two to three times a day. Some patients will find this helpful, while others may respond less to this treatment.

## Getting your care at KP

During the early stages of Fuchs' dystrophy we can help you manage your symptoms in the Ophthalmology Department. Once the disease advances, we will refer you to one of our cornea specialists for a surgical evaluation. Cornea surgeons are located at most of our medical centers in Northern California.

If you have changes in your vision, or other eye symptoms, or need to schedule an eye exam, you can make an appointment by calling our call center (415) 833-2200. The call center can also put you through to an advice nurse if you need immediate advice about your eye. Our advice nurses are available 24/7. You can also email your doctor through our web site [www.kp.org](http://www.kp.org). Once you have registered for a user id, you can access your prescription information, look at your lab results, view summaries from previous doctor's visits as well as send a message to your physician.