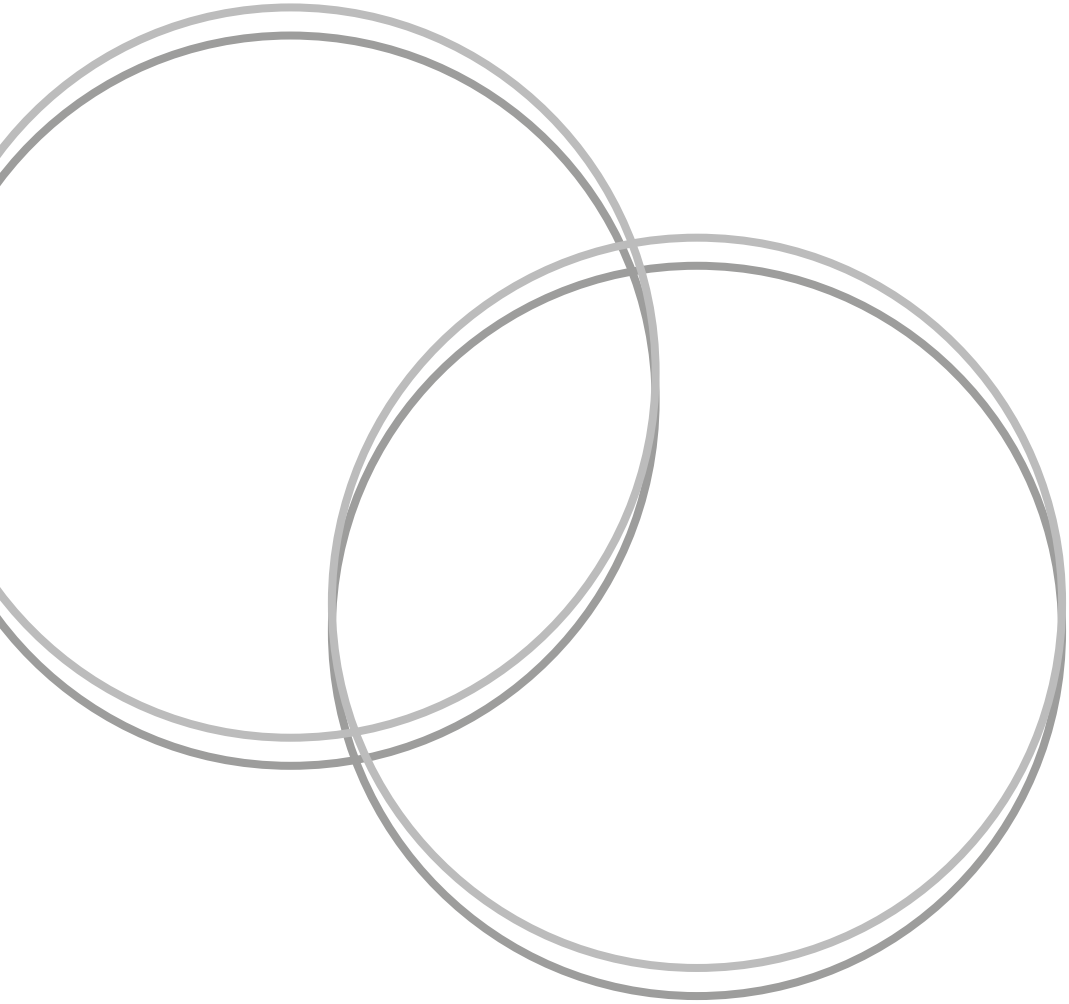
Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

# Fuchs' Endothelial Corneal Dystrophy

**Information for patients**



# What is Fuchs' Endothelial Corneal Dystrophy (FECD)?

Fuchs' Endothelial Corneal Dystrophy (or simply, Fuchs' dystrophy) is a disease of the cornea and affects both eyes. The cornea is the clear, dome-shaped window of the front of your eye, that allows light to enter the eye as well as focus the light.

The cornea has three main layers – the outer epithelial layer, the middle stromal layer, and the inner endothelial layer. The Descemet's membrane separates the stroma from the endothelial layer.

The cornea needs to remain clear to function properly, and it is the cells on the inner endothelial layer of the cornea which are responsible for keeping it clear. These endothelial cells act as a pump and remove fluid from the cornea keeping it clear.

As people get older, everyone loses some of these cells. With Fuchs' dystrophy, more cells are lost than normal. When this happens, extra fluid stays in the cornea and makes it swollen and cloudy. This can cause blurry vision, like looking through a foggy window.

# What are the symptoms of Fuchs' endothelial corneal dystrophy (FECD)?

Fuchs' dystrophy develops slowly. At first, you might not notice anything is wrong, and it might only be found during a normal eye test.

- Early on, your vision may be a little blurry when you wake up, but it usually gets better later in the day.
- As the condition gets worse, the blurring of vision becomes worse, remains throughout the day, and does not improve as the day goes on.
- The extra fluid in your cornea causes your eyes to be more sensitive to light (glare), and this can be particularly bothersome at night, for example when driving.
- In more advanced cases, tiny blisters may form on the surface of the cornea. These blisters may break open causing eye pain and eventually corneal scarring.

# What causes Fuchs' dystrophy (FECD)?

Fuchs' dystrophy often runs in families. If one of your parents has it, you have a higher chance of getting it too. People in the same family can have it more or less severely. Some people get Fuchs' dystrophy even when no one else in their family has it.

Fuchs' dystrophy is more common in women than in men. Early signs can show up in your 30s or 40s, but most people do not notice symptoms until they are in their 50s or older. Doctors do not yet know why the cells in the cornea are lost faster in this condition.

# Do I need to have surgery?

If your symptoms are mild and you are happy with your vision, you do not need to have surgery. However, if you are having difficulty with your vision, despite treatment with eye drops, surgery may be an option for you.

# Is there a link between cataracts and Fuchs' dystrophy?

Fuchs' dystrophy and cataract are both conditions which affect your vision as you get older. They are separate conditions and are not linked to each other. However, if you were to have cataract surgery to remove your cataracts, there is a chance that the Fuchs' dystrophy worsens.

Sometimes cataract surgery can make Fuchs' dystrophy worse, because the surgery can cause more cell loss in the cornea.

If you have a cataract and only mild Fuchs' dystrophy, your doctor may remove the cataract first. If your cornea stays cloudy afterward, you might then need a cornea transplant. Many people with mild Fuchs' dystrophy do not need a transplant.

If you have more advanced Fuchs' dystrophy and cataracts, your doctor may plan both surgeries together or on different days.

# Can Fuchs' dystrophy come back after surgery?

Fuchs' dystrophy cannot return in the newly-transplanted corneal transplant. Whilst there is no cure for Fuchs' dystrophy, treatment in the form of corneal transplantation is very effective and has a high success rate. However, a repeat transplant may be required in certain circumstances.

# Contacting us

If you have a minor eye problem, please seek advice from your GP, optician or pharmacist.

### Call our specialist telephone triage number if you need URGENT help or advice or if you notice:

- Redness and/or swelling of your eye lids and/or eyeball
- Any loss of sight
- Intense pain

Tel: **01865 234 567**
(select the option for "Eye Emergencies")

Monday to Friday
8:30am – 4:30pm

Saturday and Sunday
8:30am – 3:30pm (including Bank Holidays)

You will be able to speak to an ophthalmic health professional who will advise you.

If you need advice out of hours, please phone NHS111 or your out of hours GP practice.

### Further information

NHS Website: www.nhs.uk

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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