

Post-mortem Eye Care for the Potential Eye Donor

Tear production stops at the time of death, so it doesn't take long for the cornea to dry out. Another problem is that lubricating ointments used prior to death tend to congeal. This can pull the delicate epithelial covering of the cornea away.

For all deaths that are potential eye donors, the following eye care regimen should be performed. A common question is "How long do we have to do this eye care after death?" It's a difficult question to answer. The Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Bank is sensitive to the needs of the donor's family, so their needs must come first. A saline rinse prior to giving the family time with their loved one is a good idea to keep some moisture in the eye. After the family is finished, another rinse followed by the remaining steps should be performed.



Rinse both eyes with sterile saline or balanced salt solution. This will help remove any residue from lubricating ointments used prior to death. This step can be done prior to family viewing and then repeated before proceeding after the family has finished its bedside rituals.



Close both eyelids using your fingers. Do not use forceps or other instruments, as they can easily damage the lids.



Cover both closed eyes with a compress (2x2 or 4x4 gauze) soaked in saline. The compress should be dripping wet if possible. Do not press the gauze hard onto the eyes, just set it firmly on top of the lids ensuring it covers the lid line.



Elevate the head using a pillow or head block. This helps fluids to drain from the head, minimizing the chance of bleeding or bruising during the eye tissue recovery procedure.