

Emergency cornea transplants save young man's sight

When Reilly Huber woke up one morning with a little eye pain, it didn't seem like a big deal.

"It felt like I must have just scratched my eye, and it would go away within the day," he remembers.

But the pain didn't go away – in fact, it got worse. At work that day, Reilly kept going to the bathroom to flush his eye out with cold water, hoping for some relief. During one of those bathroom trips, he noticed a little white dot on his right eye.

"I knew this was trouble," he says.

He called his parents for advice. They decided a trip to the ophthalmologist was in order, so they set up an appointment for a few days later. But each day, the pain in Reilly's eye increased. He was unable to wear his contacts and his vision started to blur.

At his appointment, his ophthalmologist diagnosed him with corneal ulcers, often the result of improper contact lens use, and prescribed eye drops to fight off infection.

That night, though, things got worse. The pain, Reilly says, was too much for him.

Reilly's family took him back to the ophthalmologist. There, the doctor took samples from Reilly's eye and gave him powerful broad-spectrum antibiotic eye drops. They made the burning worse, and had to be administered every half hour, but Reilly managed to find some relief, thanks to numbing eye drops and painkillers.

It was a difficult course of treatment, but it seemed to be working. About two weeks after the pain began, Reilly's ulcers were receding and he seemed to be getting better.

But he quickly took a turn for the worse, putting his vision in jeopardy. "My right eye ruptured," he explains.



Reilly Huber suffered from corneal ulcers before receiving sight-restoring transplants.

After being examined by three ophthalmologists who confirmed the rupture, he was sent into emergency surgery at Rush University Medical Center for a cornea transplant to repair his right eye.

Preventative surgery was also performed on his left eye, which was on the verge of rupturing as well. Unfortunately, it still ruptured, and he went back into surgery for an additional transplant the next morning.

Reilly stayed in hospital for nine days, under the careful watch of his ophthalmologist. When he was released, Reilly was required to take medication and use eye drops to further his recovery. At the time, Reilly was pursuing an Emergency Medical Technician license, which he had to put on hold while he healed.

Now, nearly two years later, his life is back on track, thanks to the gift of donated cornea tissue that restored his sight. He has returned to school, and with contact lenses, he can see 20/20. He has also become a strong advocate for donation, sharing his story wherever he can and encouraging others to sign up on the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry. It's his way of honoring his donors, and showing his gratitude to Eversight Illinois. He is thankful every day for Eversight's ability to act quickly, and provide the tissue needed for his time-sensitive surgery.

And after his harrowing experience, he always takes time to practice good contact lens care.