

Otoplasty (child)

CM03 Lite - Expires end of January 2027



This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is an otoplasty?

An otoplasty (or pinnaplasty) is an operation to improve the appearance of your child's ears.

Is an otoplasty suitable for my child?

Your child is most likely to benefit from an otoplasty if one or more of the following conditions apply to them.

- Your child is self-conscious about the size or shape of their ears.
- Your child is being teased and this is causing them distress.
- Your child has unusually shaped ears.

An otoplasty will not improve your child's physical health. For this reason, the operation should be performed only if the aim is to improve their self-confidence and to make them more comfortable with their appearance.

What are the benefits of surgery?

Your child's ears should have a better shape.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

For a short time after birth, the cartilage of a baby's ears is still soft. It may be possible to permanently change the shape of the ears using moulding splints.

What will happen if I decide that my child will not have the operation?

Ears grow to almost their full size by the time a child is 6 years old. So ears that were more obvious in a child may not be as obvious when your child grows up.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is usually performed under a general anaesthetic.

For older children (young adults) the operation can be performed using only a local anaesthetic.

The operation usually takes about an hour.

Your surgeon will make a cut at the back of the ear and peel off some skin from the cartilage. They will change the shape of the cartilage so the ear lies closer to your child's head.

Through the same cut at the back of the ear, your surgeon may also make a cut just inside the cartilage so they can peel back the skin from the front of the cartilage and lightly score it. This technique tends to make the cartilage bend towards your child's head.

Your surgeon will pack your child's ears with moulding material and place a dressing on your child's head to give the ears support.

What can I do to prepare my child for the operation?

Your child should try to maintain a healthy weight. They will have a higher risk of developing complications if they are overweight.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to reduce the risk of complications.

Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for your child.

Some complications can be serious.

General complications of any operation

- Bleeding after the operation. Your child may need another operation to stop the bleeding and prevent an unsightly cosmetic result.
- Infection, usually caused by bacteria from inside the ear getting into your wound.
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication.

Specific complications of this operation

- Cosmetic problems. It is difficult to predict exactly how your child's ears will look after the operation.

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain.

- Unsightly scarring of the skin.

How soon will my child recover?

Your child should be able to go home the next day.

For a few weeks, while the swelling and bruising settles, your child should rest and not do strenuous exercise.

Your child can go back to school after the head dressing has been removed but you may want to wait another 1 to 2 weeks until it is difficult to tell that they have had surgery.

Your child should not play sports for 6 weeks.

The results of an otoplasty are usually permanent.

Summary

An otoplasty is an operation to improve the appearance of your child's ears. The operation should be performed only if the aim is to improve their self-confidence and to make them more comfortable with their appearance. You should consider the options carefully and have realistic expectations about the results.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

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