

What is Otoplasty?

Otoplasty or pinnaplasty is an operation that is usually done to set back prominent ears closer to the side of the head, but can also be used to correct overly large ears.

When to have surgery

Some children are born with prominent ears and it is possible in the first few months of life to use an ear splint that may well help in remoulding the shape of the ear thus avoiding subsequent surgery at a later stage.

However, the majority of otoplasty is carried out in children after the age of six. By then the ears are almost fully grown at this stage and the cartilage relatively easy to reshape. This also coincides with the child's awareness that they might be slightly "different" to their peer group, and possible experience of teasing at school.

Most surgeons who carry out otoplasty recommend that it be carried out when the child wants the change as they will be generally more co-operative and happier with the outcome.

The surgery: What is involved?

At the initial consultation, your surgeon will evaluate the ears and establish what is required to produce the desired shape. There are several techniques that can be used to reshape and set back prominent ears, so the most appropriate ones for the individual will be discussed.

A technique that is often used involves the removal of a small ellipse of skin from behind the ear to expose the ear cartilage and then the surgeon can reshape the ear cartilage either using stitches alone or a combination of stitches and scoring of the cartilage to create a natural looking fold to the ear and a normal position in relation to the head.

Otoplasty usually takes between one and two hours to perform although more complicated procedures may take longer and your surgeon will be able to discuss with you the likely length of the operation. In the United Kingdom, otoplasty is usually performed under a general anaesthetic. However, some surgeons may prefer to use local anaesthesia especially with an adult patient. Otoplasty can be carried out as a day case procedure but occasionally your doctor may recommend an overnight stay.

After the surgery

Most patients will be up within a few hours of surgery but you will be recommended to stay in hospital until the effects of the anaesthesia has worn off. The patient's head is usually wrapped in a head bandage immediately after the surgery to promote the best moulding and healing.

The ears may throb or ache for a few days but this operation should not be particularly painful and only simply painkillers are usually required. The ears may feel a little numb after the operation but this usually settles within a few weeks.

The head bandage is usually removed five to seven days after the surgery and your surgeon will recommend using some form of head band (tennis sweat band) at night to make sure that there is no pulling forward of the ears when asleep. Stitches from behind the ear are usually removed at the same time as the head dressing.

Most children can go back to school about seven days after the surgery but should be careful with play-ground activity and should avoid contact sport for six weeks. Adults can usually go back to work after seven days.

Results

The vast majority of patients who undergo this surgery are pleased with the results. However, it should be kept in mind that the aim of surgery is an improvement in the shape of the ear and not perfection.

It is difficult to get perfectly matched ears and it is important that you discuss the procedure and your expectations with the surgeon before the surgery to try to ensure that you end up