

What is an otoplasty?

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

Your surgeon will assess you and tell you if an otoplasty is suitable for you. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your surgeon or the healthcare team.

Is an otoplasty suitable for me?

You are most likely to benefit from an otoplasty if one or more of the following conditions apply to you.

- You are self-conscious about the size or shape of your ears.
- You are being teased and this is causing you distress. If your ears are only a little unusual, an otoplasty will not make much difference and the teasing may continue. It may be better to get help with your social skills so you can cope with teasing.
- You have unusually-shaped ears, ears that are large and stick out ('bat ears') or ears that are different from each other (asymmetry).

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

What are the benefits of surgery?

Your ears should have a better shape.

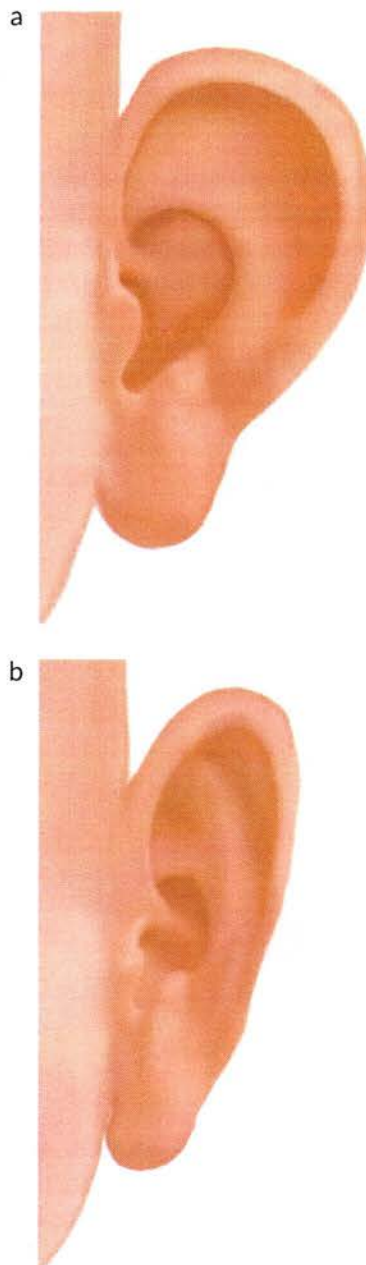
Most people who have a successful otoplasty are more comfortable with their appearance.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

For adults, surgery is the only option to change the shape of your ears.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

It is possible to hide unusually-shaped ears behind a hairstyle. This is usually easier for women.



a An ear sticking out with unusual folds

b An ear closer to the head with more normal folds

What does the operation involve?

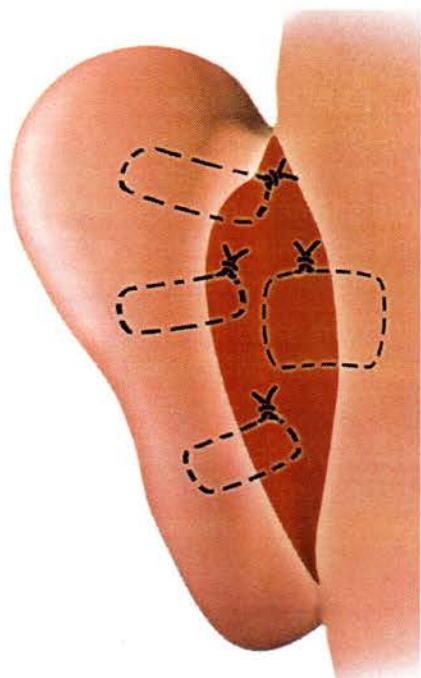
The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for and on the correct side. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

The operation is usually performed under a local anaesthetic. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection.

The operation usually takes about an hour.

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

Your surgeon may need to use stitches under the skin to hold your ear in position and to create folds. Often these stitches are dissolvable but sometimes your surgeon will need to use permanent stitches.



Cuts and stitches used to re-shape the ear

Through the same cut at the back of your 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 head.

Your surgeon will close any cuts with dissolvable stitches or a running stitch that can be removed easily.

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



Scoring on the inside of the ear

What should I do about my medication?

Make sure your healthcare team knows about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

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 you.

Some complications can be serious.

You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand.

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

General complications of any operation

- Pain. Most people do not have any pain straight after the operation because of the local anaesthetic but you may need to take simple painkillers such as paracetamol later on the same day and the day after.
- Bleeding after the operation (risk: less than 1 in 10). If you notice even a small amount of blood soaking through the dressing or dripping behind your ear, let your surgeon know straightaway. You may need another operation to stop the bleeding and prevent an unsightly cosmetic result.
- Infection, usually caused by bacteria from inside your ear getting into your wound. If your ear becomes more painful in the first few days, let your surgeon know straightaway. An infection can usually be treated with antibiotics. A serious infection can cause an unsightly cosmetic result.
- Unsightly scarring of your skin. The scars usually settle with time. If you have dark skin or very pale skin, the scars can sometimes stay thick and red. The risk is higher if the scars are slow to heal. If you notice the scars becoming thick and red, let your surgeon know straightaway. Sometimes the scars can be treated with steroid injections or even by another operation.

Specific complications of this operation

- Cosmetic problems. It is difficult to predict exactly how your ears will look after the operation. Most people's ears are a different size and shape to begin with so it is normal to have small differences even after the operation. Sometimes your ears may have been set back too much, or not enough, or they may have an unsightly shape because of the head dressing. It is possible to have these problems corrected by another operation.

- Cauliflower ear, caused by bleeding under the skin. This can usually be treated by drawing out the blood using a syringe.

How soon will I recover?

In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward.

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after.

If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

Returning to normal activities

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination. If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

For a few weeks, while the swelling and bruising settles, rest and do not do strenuous exercise. If you notice any bleeding or your ear becomes more painful in the first few days, let your surgeon know straightaway.

It is important that you do not remove the head dressing or try to touch your ears.

The healthcare team will arrange for you to come back to the clinic after 1 to 2 weeks to remove the head dressing and any stitches.

Your surgeon may recommend that you wear a headband and light head dressing at night to prevent your ears from folding and causing an unsightly cosmetic result.

You can return to work 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 you have had surgery.

Do not play sports for 6 weeks.

The future

The results of an otoplasty are usually permanent. If you have had permanent stitches, these may need to be removed at some time in the future if they cause problems.

Summary

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

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

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

Acknowledgements

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