

Otoplasty

Q. How old do you have to be to get ear surgery?

A. Otoplasty is performed on patients as young as five but typically at seven. Some children have ears that have reached their full size and sit at an angle that is not suited to the desired position or shape. It is better to recognize the need for the procedure at a younger age and have it done at the appropriate time rather than wait until adulthood.

Q. What happens during the procedure?

A. The main reason the ears look flat is the anti-helical fold, the “concha” cartilage that determines how close the ears sit to the side of the head. If the anti-helical fold is too small or underdeveloped, it will cause the ears to flare outwards. Too much cartilage also causes the ears to push out further than normal. Both helix and concha have to be corrected according to each patient’s needs during the procedure.

The ears are re-sculpted by either enhancing the anti-helical fold wall, and/or by removing excess cartilage until the ears sit at a nicer angle. A small incision behind the ear allows for excess cartilage to be trimmed away. Small incisions are made along the inside of the ear cartilage to reshape and create more aesthetic folds in the inner ear. In some instances, removing cartilage is unnecessary because stitches are used to hold the cartilage firmly in place after sculpting the ear to its desired shape. Since the majority of incisions made are behind the ears, scarring is minimally visible.

Q. What about the recovery period?

A. After 7-10 days patients normally return to their regular routine, since most of the swelling and bruising goes down after the first few days. It is recommended that patients with long hair pin the hair back and away from the ears to reduce infection and allow the area to heal properly. Depending on your surgeon, a head-band dressing may be worn around the ears for the first 4-6 weeks to allow the area to heal and stay clean. Sometimes patients experience minor discomfort during sleep due to the pressure on the ears, so it is recommended to sleep on your back until the area has fully healed.

Q. What are the risks involved?

A. There are few risks associated with Otoplasty and it is a common surgery performed on children as young as five years of age. This procedure has a shorter recovery period than other facial procedures.

- ▶ **Infection:** is the most common risk in cosmetic procedures and needs to be monitored closely, especially in children. Infection is unusual and can be treated with antibiotics.
- ▶ **Blood clots:** Blood clots forming in the ear are a rare complication and usually dissolve naturally. If excess bleeding occurs, patients should see their doctor immediately.
- ▶ **Overcorrection:** refers to a number of complications including ears too close to the head, contour distortions and asymmetric correction.
- ▶ **Loosening of sutures:** is more common among children since physical activity, rough play or tossing during sleep may cause the sutures to come loose, thereby causing the ear to return to its pre-surgery shape. It is important to follow the doctor’s post-operative care practices to prevent this from happening. Children and adults are encouraged to return to their normal routine after the first few days, but full recovery tends to take at least six weeks. It is important to be careful for at least a month and avoid physical activities that cause the sutures to come loose.