

Otoplasty – Surgery of the Ear

Otoplasty is one of the most common procedures for children. The majority of patients who undergo otoplasty are between 4 and 14 years old, although many adults also elect to have the procedure.

Ear surgery can correct protruding ears (excessive ear cartilage), large or otherwise deformed earlobes, "lop ear" (where the ear tip bends down and forward), and "cupped" or "shell ear" (which could be a very tiny ear or an ear without natural creases).

Malformed Ears

Malformed ears is a broad term that includes cupped ears, shelled ears, or ears that are otherwise not visible due to a birth defect. The ears are assessed for excessive cartilage, malformed cartilage, mal-positioned cartilage, and soft-tissue (skin and fat) deformity.

When Is the Best Time for Otoplasty?

Children's ears are most often fully developed by age 4. There are no additional risks associated with age. The procedure is usually performed to improve the appearance of the ears so that the child would not have to endure ridicule from peers throughout their childhood.

Firmer cartilage of fully developed ears in adults does not provide the same molding capacity as in children. Having the procedure at a young age is highly desirable for two reasons:

1. The cartilage is extremely pliable, thereby permitting greater ease of shaping.
2. The child will experience psychological benefits earlier from the cosmetic improvement.

Getting Started

During the consultation, Dr Zacharia will examine the structure of the ears and discuss possibilities for correcting the problems. Even if only one ear needs "pinning back," surgery will probably be recommended on both ears to achieve the most natural, symmetrical appearance.

Otoplasty will not alter hearing ability. In a successful otoplasty procedure, the ears will be in proportion to the size and shape of the face and head.

The Procedure

The otoplasty procedure is performed at the Bondi Junction Private Hospital, as an outpatient procedure. Surgeons typically suggest a general anesthesia for young patients and a local anesthetic combined with a mild sedative for older children and adults. For certain general anesthesia cases, an overnight hospital stay may be appropriate. Otherwise, patients return home within hours of the procedure on the same day. Under normal conditions, time in surgery is about two hours.

HOW OTOPLASTY IS PERFORMED

Techniques vary among surgeons and patients. Factors that may impact the choice of technique include the general anatomy of the ears, the extent of the ear cartilage, excessive skin in the surrounding area, or level of deformity in other areas of the ears.

There are two common otoplasty techniques:

1. The surgeon first determines the incision location by finding the most inconspicuous site on the back of the ear. Once the incision is made, Dr Zacharia will sculpt the exposed ear cartilage and re-position it closer to the head for a more natural-looking appearance. The surgeon may use non-removable stitches to help the cartilage maintain its position. In some cases, the surgeon will remove more excessive cartilage in order to enhance the ultimate appearance of the ear.



Figure 1: Ear surgery incision



2. In the second common technique, skin is removed and the ear cartilage is folded back. There is no cartilage removed in this technique. Non-removable stitches are used to help the cartilage maintain its position. Dissolvable or removable stitches are used for the incision location, which are removed or dissolve within seven days.

MICROTIA PROCEDURE

For total ear reconstruction, otherwise known as congenital microtia (ear absence), a common approach begins with developing a framework from the ribs, then elevating the back, and placing a skin graft. The ear canal is then carved out—often it is necessary to rotate the lobule. Ears that are malformed due to trauma (including burns) may undergo a variation of the reconstruction process, possibly with more extensive skin grafting, depending upon the extent of the tissue damage.

After Surgery

After the procedure, the head is wrapped in a thick bandage. Fitting of the bandage helps to maintain the new position of the ears and enhances the healing process. Patients usually return to Dr Zacharia's office within the first few days to exchange the bandage for a lighter one. You will be provided with specific instructions regarding the use of the lighter bandage. The nurses will also provide a complete post-operative instruction list, which you should follow carefully to reduce the risk of complications.

Young patients are often required to refrain from normal activity for at least seven days after surgery. Special care must be given to children throughout the first three weeks of recovery to restrict them from playful activities that may disrupt the ears. Adult patients usually return to normal activity within three days after surgery. More complicated procedures may require a longer recovery time. In all cases, the ears should not be bent for at least a month or more.

During recovery, otoplasty patients may experience

- temporary discomfort and numbness—managed with oral medications
- headaches—relieved through use of a long-acting local anesthetic
- swelling—managed with head elevation, decreases within a week
- unusual sensations—may include itching or the lack of sensation at the incision line, which can disappear over the course of six months

Complications and Risks

Complications are possible with any plastic surgery, though they are rare with otoplasty. Complications can include a blood clot on the ear or infection in the cartilage area. The surgeon may recommend a waiting period to see if the blood clot or infection (with antibiotic treatment) resolves itself. If the blood clot does not dissolve, it can be removed with a needle. Rarely, an infection may require surgical drainage. Scar tissue formation is a possibility. Patients may have a slightly visible scar on the back of the ear. However, Dr Zacharia takes special care to place the incision in an inconspicuous location.

Consult a Qualified Facial Plastic Surgeon

A qualified surgeon will help ensure the specific technique is appropriate for the condition, increase the odds of success, and reduce the risk of complications.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Here are some tips to consider when consulting a facial plastic surgeon:

- Review credentials, education, training, type of certification held, and number of times the procedure has been performed in the practice.
- View before-and-after photos of otoplasty patients.
- Ask about the extent of the procedure and where it will be performed.
- Request a list of pre and post-operative instructions. Following these instructions can reduce the risk of complications.
- Ask about complications and possible side effects of the procedure.

Doctor Zacharia looks forward to discussing the options available to you to achieve the most satisfying result for you or your family member, in an in-depth private consultation. Phone 1800 685 438