

PINNAPLASTY (or OTOPLASTY)

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What is Pinnaplasty (or Otoplasty) ?

They are different names for the same operation, which is to correct misshapen ears. Usually this is due to the absence of a fold in the ear cartilage (the antihelix) or an over-pronounced 'bowl' of the ear around the ear canal opening.

Why have the operation ?

The aim of the operation is to make the ears protrude less, and to look natural.

This may be done in children when they are teased at school, and to allow them to be less self-conscious.

The ideal age for this is around 5 to 6, when the cartilage of the ear is mature enough, but before the child is subjected to prolonged psychologically hurtful teasing.

Adults who don't like the shape of their ears also come to see me about this procedure, often having wanted it done since they were children. This is particularly in men with short hair, or women who wish to wear their hair up, when the ears are not covered by their hair.

The operation is mostly done for both ears, but sometimes patients have it done on one ear only, if there is a big discrepancy between the shape of the two ears.

I am very careful not to over-correct the deformity, and the ideal result I achieve is that the casual observer is not aware that any surgery to the ears has taken place.

How is the operation done?

Please see the 'pinnaplasty' section in the gallery for some pictures of the operation.

The operation is carried out under general anaesthetic (GA), usually as a Day Case (i.e you can go home the same day.)

The cartilage is exposed via an incision in the skin behind the ear, and as part of this incision a small amount of skin is removed from this area.

The cartilage of the ear is then shaped to recreate the fold required, and stitches inserted to hold the ear in the desired position long term.

What happens after the operation?

The ears are packed with small pieces of cotton wool soaked in antiseptic, and a head bandage placed around the head (like a turban) before you are woken up from the anaesthetic. The head bandage stays on for 3 to 4 days, before I painlessly remove it for you in outpatients. The stitches in the skin I use are usually dissolvable and therefore don't need to be removed.

I would then advise you or your child to wear a headband or tubigrip (a make up band is a good option) for 2 weeks 24 hours a day and then just at night for the 2 weeks after that.

When can I wash my hair or swim?

You can wash your hair after 2 weeks, when the incision behind the ear is satisfactorily healed. Having a bath or shower before this is fine, however, as long as the ear is kept dry – a shower cap is useful for this.

You should wait 4 to 6 weeks before swimming, however, to prevent infection before the ear is well healed.

When can I go back to work or school?

In general, you will need 2 weeks off work or school following pinnaplasty.

What can go wrong with the operation?

Problems with this operation are extremely rare.

Like all surgery, there is a very small risk of infection, which in this case is usually associated with a collection of blood (haematoma) under the skin of the ear.

Pinnaplasty is normally not a painful procedure and any discomfort should quickly improve. Therefore, if the discomfort levels following the operation rise significantly over the first few days then a haematoma is a possibility and you should contact my secretary to arrange for me to see you without delay.

Like all cosmetic procedures of any sort, there is a small risk that the shape of the ear is not entirely satisfactory afterwards, and that a second (revision) operation is required.

I have not yet had to revise one of my own pinnaplasty operations, but I have revised operations done elsewhere.