

ENT

Cochlear Implant

Introduction

A cochlear implant is a hearing device that helps children and adults to hear speech and environmental sounds clearly, when hearing aids are not helping enough. For children, it is very important to be able to hear and tell the difference between speech sounds, in order to learn to listen and talk, and have clear speech.

Cochlear implants have 2 parts: an inside part (the implant), which is surgically implanted into the cochlea in the inner ear, and an outside part (the sound processor) which is usually worn behind the ear and looks a little bit like a hearing aid. The implant and the processor work together to help your child hear. Most children have 2 cochlear implants (one for each ear) and these are usually implanted during one surgery. The processors are fitted approximately 2 weeks later and the process of learning to listen with cochlear implants begins.

The cochlear implant team will assess your child and make a recommendation about whether or not cochlear implants are a suitable option for your child. Assessment includes hearing tests, communication assessment, counselling and an MRI scan of the inner ear. Alternative options are to continue with hearing aids, or to use British Sign Language (BSL).

Sometimes the team may recommend cochlear implants alongside also using BSL or Sign Supported English.

If the team recommend cochlear implants for your child, it is your choice to accept them, or not. If you accept them, your child will be placed on the waiting list for surgery.

Guidance for Parents

While you are waiting for your child's assessment to be completed, or once your child is on the waiting list for surgery, we recommend:



Continued use of hearing aids, aiming for all waking hours. Even if your child is not showing responses to sound, keeping the hearing aids on will keep the hearing pathway (from ear to brain) stimulated – even minimally. It will also help your child get used to wearing hearing equipment on their ears, which will be important for them once they have their cochlear implants fitted.

You may wish to consider using some Sign Supported English (SSE) (or your home language), to help your child communicate while you are waiting. SSE is a way of adding key word signs to your spoken language, using your voice and your normal spoken language word order. For example: when you say the sentence “It’s time for bed”, you could add the sign for “bed”. Your teacher of the deaf will be able to help you with this and talk to you about the best way to use it.

Health and wellbeing if you have to wait

The cochlear implant team have a system for prioritising MRI scan requests and cochlear implant surgery. In cases of sudden onset deafness, such as following meningitis or viral infection, it is essential to fast-track these cases and so long as your child is well enough, the MRI scan and surgery can take place within 2-3 weeks of referral.

We are very conscious of the time critical nature of cochlear implants and the need for early implantation for children born with bilateral profound hearing loss. Our prioritisation system takes into consideration age, educational stage and extent of speech and language delay in addition to the length of time on the waiting list. If you are worried you are waiting too long for your child’s surgery, please do not hesitate to contact us and we can explain to you where your child currently is on the waiting list.

Contact us

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