Royal National Throat Nose and Ear Hospital

Cochlear implants for adults
Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery
What is a Cochlear Implant?
A cochlear implant is an electronic device designed to restore a sensation of hearing to children, adults and young people who have a severe to profound deafness. It consists of an external speech processor and an electrode array, which is surgically placed under the skin and connects to the hearing nerves in the inner ear.

How is the operation done?
The operation is done under a general anaesthetic. A small amount of hair behind the ear is shaved in an area about two inches from your hairline. The operation takes place in theatre and will take between two and five hours to complete depending on whether one ear or both ears are being implanted. In straightforward cases, it takes approximately two hours per side.

You will wake up with a large bandage (like a turban) on your head. This will be in place overnight. Sometimes the surgeon will put some antiseptic gauze in your ear canal, which if present should be left for a week or two to protect the wound. This will be removed at your outpatient appointment.

Before you come to hospital
If you are an adult, arrange a couple of weeks off work after the operation and check that you have a relative or friend who can take you safely home and look after you for the first few days after surgery.

We will ask you to attend a pre-assessment clinic a few weeks before the date of your surgery to ensure you are fit for the general anaesthetic you will have during surgery.
Will I have to stay in hospital after the operation?
Recovery after the operation is variable but most patients feel better very quickly. You are likely to be discharged the same evening of the surgery or remain in hospital for one night after the surgery.

Does it hurt?
You may experience some discomfort in your ear but ordinary pain killers should help this. The area around the scar, including part of your ear, will be numb and sensation should slowly return over a period of six months.

However, in some cases sensation may never fully return to normal. You may also have some swelling around your ear, which should settle within the first two to three weeks.

How long will I be off work?
You will need to rest at home for at least a week as you may continue to feel dizzy and tired, however this will steadily improve. If you do manual work or your job requires a lot of bending and tipping of your head you may need a further one to two weeks off. When you come in for the operation tell your nurse if you need a sick certificate for when you leave hospital. This can be extended by your GP.

When do I come back to Outpatients?
A follow-up appointment in outpatients usually takes place about one to two weeks after the operation. The surgeon will generally use dissolvable stitches, which do not need to be removed. Once your hair has grown back and your scar has healed, the only evidence of the operation will be a small bump just behind the ear.
After you leave hospital – looking after your ear

- It is important that the operation site remains dry so ask the nurse before you leave hospital to advise you on how to wash your face whilst at the same time protecting the scar area. You are encouraged to wait a minimum of two weeks after surgery before gently washing your hair. You need to take care to keep the wound dry and be very careful with that area for the first month. After the first month, treat the wound as normal and if you are a keen swimmer you can restart then.

- Flying should be avoided for four weeks after.

- Do not dye or perm your hair for three months.

- We advise you to avoid all activities that might cause a blow to the head, e.g. rugby, football and boxing as these could potentially cause damage to the implant.

- Also, we would advise against doing such activities as scuba diving as the pressure changes involved in deep water diving could damage the implant.

Contact details

B Ward: 020 3456 5029
C Ward: 020 3456 5027
Implant Office: 020 3456 5001
Fax: 020 3456 5003
SMS: 07899 748 917 (Please no voice mail)
Are there any complication or risks?

• You may get some dizziness and or sickness for a few days after the operation. These symptoms can also occur if you turn your head quickly or bend down suddenly. This is usually temporary.

• It is likely that some people find their taste is impaired on one side of their tongue. This usually improves gradually over time.

• It is possible that the wound may become swollen and painful which may be a sign it has become infected. In the unlikely event that this happens you would be treated with antibiotics. With a serious infection the implant may have to be removed but this is a rare occurrence. You should contact the cochlear implant office for further advice.

• Facial nerve bruising: This nerve running near the site of surgery is carefully monitored throughout the operation. This ensures that bruising or damage of the facial nerve rarely occurs.

• Implant breakdown: This rarely occurs though a further operation would be necessary to replace the broken or faulty implant.

• If the implant has to be removed it will not be possible to go back to using a hearing aid in that ear.

• Rarely, people notice a change in their tinnitus. It may get louder or it may disappear altogether. It will usually return to normal levels after a few weeks.

Health and Safety

You should have received a copy of the British Cochlear Implant Group (BCIG) safety guidelines. This document contains information that provides realistic guidance to cochlear implant users to minimize potential problems. If you would like further copies please contact the cochlear implant office. You will also be sent yearly updated information on safety issues concerning cochlear implants.
Asking for your consent

We want to involve you in all the decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead with treatment, by law we must ask for your consent and will ask you to sign a consent form. This confirms that you agree to have the procedure and understand what it involves. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to sign a consent form. If you are unsure about any aspect of your proposed treatment, please don’t hesitate to speak with a senior member of staff again.

Where can I get more information?

NHS Direct
Telephone: 0845 4647
Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

University College London Hospitals
235 Euston Road, London. NW1 2BU Switchboard: 0845 155 5000
Website: www.uclh.nhs.uk

UCLH cannot accept responsibility for information provided by external organisations.

PALS - If you have any concerns

PALS is a patient-friendly, easy to access service designed to provide a personal contact point to assist patients, relatives and carers. If you have a problem that you have not been able to sort out we can help you to resolve it. PALS are open 10:00 till 16:00 Monday to Friday.

Telephone: 020 3447 3042
Email: pals@uclh.nhs.uk
How to get here
The hospital is near King’s Cross Station. There is no car parking at
the hospital. Pay and display parking areas are available nearby but
these are frequently full. You are advised to travel by public transport.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of the
document, please contact us on 020 3456 5305. We will try
our best to meet your needs.