

A Parent's Guide to Cochlear Implants



What is a cochlear implant?



A cochlear implant is a surgical prosthetic device for the inner ear.

- A cochlear implant system uses one part on the head and on the ear that picks up sound, and sends it to the implanted part in the inner ear.
- The implanted part includes a tiny electrode/wire that stimulates the nerve attached to the inner ear to send sounds to the brain.
- The part on the ear/on the head can sometimes look like a hearing aid.



Why consider a cochlear implant?



Children with severe to profound hearing levels and children with poor speech perception may benefit from a device called a cochlear implant.

- Your child's hearing loss exceeds the limitations of their current hearing technology, so they are not receiving full access to spoken language, as determined by their audiologist or speech/language pathologist.
- Families may be interested in ensuring their child has access to environmental sounds that they otherwise cannot access with hearing aid technology.

How would my child get a cochlear implant?



If your audiologist, speech/language pathologist, or ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT) thinks your child might benefit from a cochlear implant, you may be referred to a cochlear implant program for testing to see if your child is a candidate.



Testing to see if your child is a candidate can involve a multidisciplinary team with different professionals and appointments.

- There are many factors when deciding if your child is a candidate.
- The cochlear implant program you may be referred to will go over this process with you.



Talk to your audiologist about the possibility of your child being a candidate if:

- They were born with severe to profound hearing loss.
- They have hearing loss that has progressed suddenly or over time.
- They do not benefit from their current hearing aid technology.



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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



Do cochlear implants make hearing normal?

A cochlear implant does not restore hearing to normal. The sound quality is different from listening through a hearing aid or listening without hearing technology. Cochlear implants typically provide significantly improved access to soft sounds.



What if I'm unsure if my child could be a candidate?

- You can always ask your audiologist for their input about the possibility of a cochlear implant. They may also be able to send you to someone who could answer your questions.
- If an audiologist recommends a cochlear implant candidacy evaluation, the cochlear implant team will be able to help determine realistic expectations for your child.



Does it matter how old my child is?

As a general rule, most benefit is achieved when children receive cochlear implants as soon as possible after diagnosis or progression of hearing loss. The earlier, the better.



What is the surgery like?

Your child will likely stay overnight for one night following surgery. Your surgeon/your implant team will go over the specifics with you.



What if my child is not a candidate?

- That is okay! There are many potential reasons they may not be a candidate, including medical reasons, realistic expectations, or limited availability of local support services.
- It is good to continue focusing on their current means of communication, whether that is spoken language and hearing technology, or a visual means such as sign language.
- Do not hesitate to talk to your providers, educational team, and other parents about what modifications in technology, therapy, or communication might benefit your child.



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