

PLASTIC SURGERY OF THE EAR

Otoplasty

A SOLUTION FOR A VERY COMMON PROBLEM

The most common cosmetic problem that people have with their ears is that they protrude. Otoplasty is the name given to the operation designed to “pin back” the ears and to change their shape and contour.

While otoplasty can be performed at any age after four or five years, it often is recommended in the preschool years to alleviate possible teasing at school by other children.

DECIDING ON AN OPERATION

Anyone interested in cosmetic surgery of the ear for himself or a child consult a competent facial plastic surgeon. During the initial visit, the surgeon makes a thorough evaluation of the ears to determine whether surgery is indicated. The surgeon will then discuss any questions and concerns related to the surgery.

In addition to the skill of the surgeon, the patient’s realistic expectations about the results of the surgery and his general emotional state are important considerations. Mental attitude is as important as the ability to heal in evaluating candidates for facial plastic surgery.

Once surgery is agreed upon, pre-operative photographs are taken to help the surgeon plan the operation. These photographs usually are compared with similar ones taken sometime after surgery and serve as a permanent before-and-after record of the results.

HOW OTOPLASTY IS DONE

Otoplasty is performed through incisions along the back of the ear to expose the ear cartilage. Portions of the cartilage may be removed and the remaining cartilage is repositioned. Permanent sutures often are used to maintain the correction. The skin behind the ear is sutured, and a large soft dressing secures and protects the ears in their new position for several days. The skin sutures are removed within a few days, and the patient is cautioned to protect the ears from injury.

WHERE SURGERY IS PERFORMED

The operation can be performed in a hospital, an ambulatory surgical care center or an office surgery center, depending on the patient’s and the physician’s preference. It can be performed safely on an outpatient basis, but the physician may recommend a short stay in the hospital.

KEEPING THE PATIENT COMFORTABLE

Most adolescent and adult patients need only a relaxing pre-operative medication followed by a local anesthetic. If desired, general anesthesia can be administered, particularly with younger patients.

THE IMMEDIATE AFTER-EFFECTS

After the operation, some swelling and bruising of the ears can be expected. The swelling usually subsides within the first few days, and the bruising subsides within a couple of weeks. There may be mild discomfort for a short time after surgery, but this usually is controlled easily with medication. Significant pain is quite rare.

Most patients return to work within one to two weeks after surgery. Young children may return to school with the head dressing on, if desired. Eyeglasses may be worn, provided they have been altered to avoid pressure on the ears.

THE RESULTS TO EXPECT

The degree of improvement will depend on the individual's physical characteristics and the extent of the surgery.

THE RISKS

The risks are minimal. There are inherent risks in any surgical undertaking, however, and these should be discussed thoroughly with your facial plastic surgeon. Many thousands of otoplasty operations are performed successfully each year.

THE COSTS

Fees for cosmetic surgery and operative facilities vary widely and depend on the extent and complexity of the surgery as well as on the individual surgeon. Your facial plastic surgeon and his staff will discuss costs before the operation. Fees for cosmetic surgery generally are expected in advance of surgery because this type of surgery usually is not covered by insurance. The best way to find out if an insurance company will consider a claim is to consult an insurance company representative in advance of the operation.