

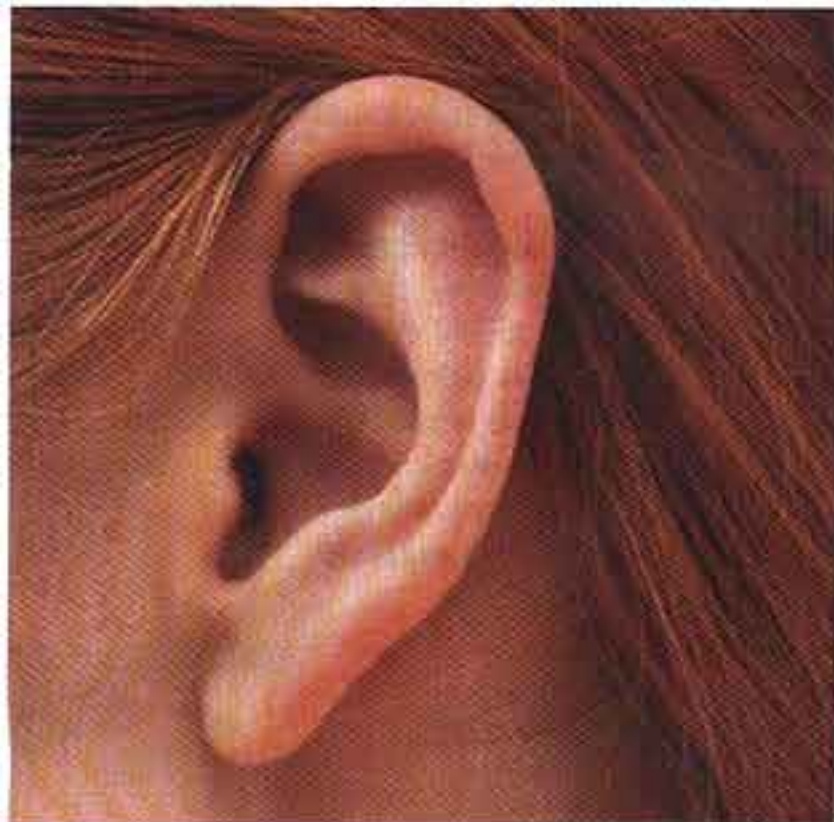
By Dr John Kippen



Pleasing to the ear

Ear surgery, or otoplasty as it's known in the medical world, can alleviate the self-esteem problems caused by prominent ears. It's a procedure by which the ears are set back closer to the head and as a result, any facial asymmetry is corrected.

There are two main physical factors contributing to prominent ears. One is an excess of cartilage in the bowl of the ear near the ear canal, while the other is an



unfolding of the ear folds. It can be quite common for one ear to be affected by either condition, but not the other.

Timing of the surgery is important. It can be performed at any age from childhood up to adult age, but is best performed after five years of age or in the early school years. If the surgery is performed in childhood, the patient needs to be old enough for ear growth to

be complete and the cartilage strong enough to hold sutures. The child should also be mature enough to handle the post-operative care needed after surgery.

An initial consultation with a plastic or cosmetic surgeon will see the upper, middle and lower ears carefully measured. The contributory causes are assessed at this time to allow accurate surgical planning.

Surgery can either be performed under general anaesthetic which is recommended for children, twilight sedation or local

anaesthetic. If general anaesthetic is used, a local anaesthetic is also applied to decrease post-surgery discomfort and limit bruising.

Surgery is performed through an incision along the back of the ear, close to the scalp, ensuring scars are well hidden. Excess cartilage is either sutured closer to the scalp or a small section is cut out. The fold is restored to a normal


appearance by either using sutures or a cartilage scraping technique.

Following surgery, the ears are carefully bandaged and packed to maintain the new folds, contours and position. This head bandage is worn for the first week. During this time scratching the ears must be avoided as this may alter the position or even fold it over. Should the head bandage fall off in the first week, it must be replaced by the

surgeon and the ears repositioned.

After this first week, a headband is then worn at night for a further six weeks to prevent the ears from folding over during sleep.

As a surgical procedure, otoplasty is generally considered to be not very painful. Bruising and swelling are common, but bleeding, scarring, infection and irregular symmetry are rare. Occasionally ear prominence can

reoccur and may require further surgery. 

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