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CM06 Pinnaplasty (adult)

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What is a pinnaplasty?

A pinnaplasty is a cosmetic operation to improve the appearance of your ears.

Your surgeon will assess you and let you know if a pinnaplasty is suitable for you. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not. This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, you should ask your surgeon or any member of the healthcare team.

Is a pinnaplasty suitable for me?

You are most likely to benefit from a pinnaplasty if one or more of the following conditions apply to you.

- You are self-conscious about the size or shape of your ears.
- You are being teased and this is causing you distress. If your ears are only a little unusual, a pinnaplasty will not make much difference and the teasing may continue. It may be better to get help with your social skills so you can cope with teasing.
- You have unusually-shaped ears, ears that are big and stick out ('bat ears') or ears that are different from each other (asymmetry).

A pinnaplasty will not improve your physical health. For this reason, the operation should be performed only if the aim is to improve your self-confidence and to make you more comfortable with your appearance.

What are the benefits of surgery?

If the operation is successful, your ears should have a better shape (see figure 1). Most people who have a successful pinnaplasty are more comfortable with their appearance.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

In adults, surgery is the only option to change the shape of the ears.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

It is possible to hide unusually-shaped ears behind a hairstyle. This is normally easier for women.

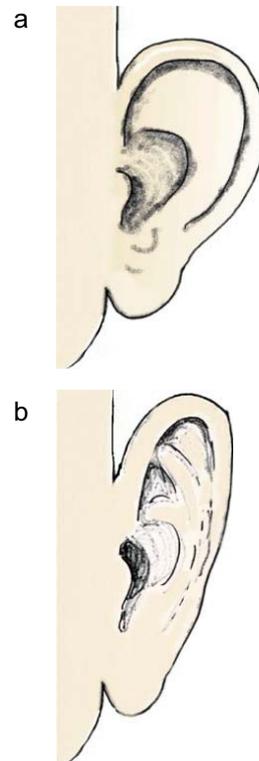


Figure 1

- a Ear sticking out with poorly-developed folds
- b Ear closer to the head with more normal folds

What does the operation involve?

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for and on the correct side. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

A pinnaplasty is usually performed under a local anaesthetic. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you and recommend the best form of anaesthesia for you. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection. The operation usually takes about an hour.

Your surgeon will make a cut at the back of the ear and peel off some skin from the cartilage. They will change the shape of the cartilage so the ear lies closer to your head. Your surgeon may need to use stitches to hold the ear in position and to create folds. Often these stitches are dissolvable but sometimes your surgeon will need to use stitches that need to be removed (see figure 2).

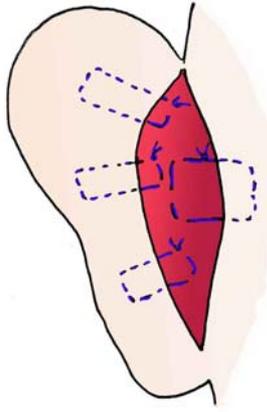


Figure 2

Cuts and stitches used to re-shape the ear

Sometimes your surgeon will also make a cut at the front of the ear and peel back the skin so they can lightly score the cartilage. This technique tends to make the cartilage bend towards the head (see figure 3).

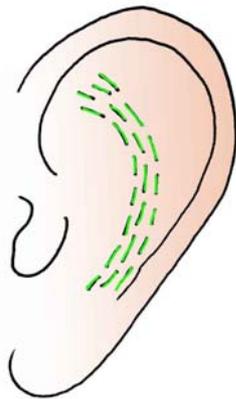


Figure 3

Scoring on the inside of the ear

At the end of the operation, your surgeon will close any cuts with dissolvable stitches or a running stitch that can be removed easily.

Your surgeon will pack your ears with moulding material and place a dressing on your head to give the ears support.

What should I do about my medication?

You should let your doctor know about all the medication you are on and follow their advice. This includes herbal remedies and medication to control diabetes and blood pressure. If you are on beta-blockers, you should continue to take them as normal. You may need to stop taking warfarin, clopidogrel, aspirin or other anti-inflammatory drugs before your operation.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before an operation may reduce your chances of getting complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher chance of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help prepare you for the operation, help you recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make your operation as safe as possible. However, complications can happen. Some of these can be serious. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

1 Complications of anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

2 General complications of any operation

- **Pain.** Most people do not have any pain straight after the operation because of the local anaesthetic. However, you may need to take simple painkillers such as paracetamol later on the same day and the day after.
- **Bleeding** after surgery (risk: less than 1 in 10). If you notice even a small amount of blood soaking through the dressing or dripping behind the ear, let your surgeon know straightaway. Usually an operation will be needed to stop the bleeding and prevent an unsightly cosmetic result.
- **Infection**, which is usually caused by bacteria from inside the ear getting into the wound. If the ear becomes more painful in the first few days after the operation, let your surgeon know straightaway. Usually an infection can be treated with antibiotics. A serious infection can cause an unsightly cosmetic result.
- **Unsightly scarring** of the skin. Usually the scars will settle over time. However, if you have dark skin or very pale skin, the scars can sometimes stay thick and red. The risk is higher if the scars are slow to heal. If you notice the scars becoming thick and red, let your surgeon know straightaway. Sometimes the scars can be treated with steroid injections or even by further surgery.

3 Specific complications of this operation

- **Cosmetic problems.** It is difficult to predict exactly how your ears will look after surgery. Most people's ears are a different size and shape to begin with so it is normal to have small differences even after surgery. Sometimes the ears may have been set back too much, or not enough, or they may have an unsightly shape because of the head dressing. It is possible to have these problems corrected by further surgery.

How soon will I recover?

• In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward.

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after. If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. You should be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact a member of the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

• Returning to normal activities

You should not drive, operate machinery (this includes cooking) or do any potentially dangerous activities for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination. If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

You should rest and not do strenuous activities for the first few weeks while the swelling and bruising settles down. If you notice any bleeding or your ear becomes more painful in the first few days, let your surgeon know straightaway.

It is important to make sure you do not remove the head dressing or try to touch your ears.

Your surgeon will ask you to come to the clinic after one to two weeks to remove the head dressing and any stitches. Your surgeon may recommend that you wear a headband and light head dressing at night to prevent your ears from folding and causing an unsightly cosmetic result.

You can go back to work after the head dressing has been removed. However, you may want to wait another week or so until it is difficult to tell you have had surgery.

You should not do any sports activities for six weeks.

• The future

The results of a pinnoplasty are usually permanent. However, if you have had permanent stitches, these may need to be removed at some time in the future if they cause problems.

Summary

A pinnaplasty is a cosmetic operation to improve the appearance of your ears. The operation should be performed only if the aim is to improve your self-confidence and to make you more comfortable with your appearance. You should consider the options carefully and have realistic expectations about the results.

Surgery is usually safe and effective. However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

Keep this information leaflet. Use it to help you if you need to talk to a healthcare professional.

Acknowledgements

Author: Mr Eoin O'Broin MD FRCS (Plast.) and Mr Graham Offer BSc FRCS (Plast.)

Illustrations: Mr Eoin O'Broin MD FRCS (Plast.)

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.