

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 an external component on the head and ear that picks up sound and sends it to the implanted internal component in the inner ear.
- The implanted component includes a tiny electrode/wire that stimulates the auditory or hearing nerve, which sends sounds from the inner ear to the brain.
- The external device on the ear/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 also 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 center 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 to consider when deciding if your child is a candidate.
- The cochlear implant center 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 moderate 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.



This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$235,000 Award number H61MC30766 Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, "Earliest interactions: Supporting 1-3-6 and Family Engagement". The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.





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 when compared to access provided by hearing aids.



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



How long will the surgery take?

- 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, expectations of benefit, 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.



Find more resources from Earliest Interactions:

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