

## Health and safety

You should have received a copy of the British Cochlear Implant Group (BCIG) safety guidelines. This document contains information that provides realistic guidance to cochlear implant users to minimize potential problems. If you would like further copies please ask in the cochlear implant office or download from our website ([www.royalfree.nhs.uk/cochlearimplants/](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/cochlearimplants/)).

During office hours you can contact the cochlear implant office on 020 7915 1301/2 or fax 020 7915 1303. You can send us a text message on 07899 748 917 (please no voice mail messages) or email us at:

[patricia.garratt@royalfree.nhs.uk](mailto:patricia.garratt@royalfree.nhs.uk) or  
[jeanette.sander@royalfree.nhs.uk](mailto:jeanette.sander@royalfree.nhs.uk) or  
[tracey.farrer@royalfree.nhs.uk](mailto:tracey.farrer@royalfree.nhs.uk)

If you have a problem following your surgery out of hours, please ring the ward on:

# About cochlear implants

## What is a cochlear implant?

A cochlear implant is an electronic device designed to restore a sensation of hearing to adults and young people that are severe to profoundly deaf. It consists of an external speech processor and an electrode array, which is surgically placed under the skin and connects to the hearing nerves in the inner ear.

## How is the operation done?

Before the operation, you will be given a general anesthetic. The hair behind the ear is shaved in an area about four inches from your hairline. The operation takes place in theatre and will take between two and five hours to complete. In straightforward cases it takes approximately two hours. You will wake up with a large bandage (like a turban) on your head. This will be in place for 24-48 hours and is then changed for a small dressing. Sometimes the surgeon will put some antiseptic gauze in your ear canal, which if present should be left for a week or two to protect the wound. This will be removed at your out-patient appointment.

## Before you come to hospital

Arrange a couple of weeks off work after the operation and check that you have a relative or friend who can take you home and look after you for the first few days after surgery.


Following your out-patient appointment, you will have been asked to complete a health questionnaire. This is reviewed and you may be telephoned or asked to attend the pre-assessment clinic for further tests. If these are not needed you will not need to attend the pre-assessment clinic.

## Will you have to stay in hospital after the operation?

Recovery after the operation is variable but most patients feel better very quickly. You are likely to remain in hospital for one or possibly two nights after the surgery.

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Royal Free Hampstead   
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### **Does it hurt?**

You may experience some discomfort in your ear but ordinary pain killers should help this. The area around the scar, including part of your ear, will be numb and sensation should slowly return over a period of six months. However, in some cases sensation may never fully return to normal. You may also have some swelling around your ear, which should settle within the first two to three weeks.

### **How long will I be off work?**

You will need to rest at home for at least a week as you may continue to feel dizzy and tired, however this will steadily improve. If you do manual work or your job requires a lot of bending and tipping of your head you may need a further one to two weeks off. When you come in for the operation tell your nurse if you need a sick certificate for when you leave hospital. This can be extended by your GP.

### **When do I come back to the out-patient clinic?**

A follow-up appointment usually takes place about 1-2 weeks after the operation. The surgeon will generally use dissolvable stitches, which do not need to be removed. Once your hair has grown back and your scar has healed, the only evidence of the operation will be a small bump just behind the ear.

### **After you leave hospital – looking after your ear**

It is important that the operation site remains dry so ask the nurse before you leave hospital and she can advise you on how to wash your face / shave whilst at the same time protecting the scar area. We encourage you to wait a minimum of two weeks after surgery before **gently** washing your hair. You need to take care to keep the wound dry and be very careful with that area for the first month. After the first month, treat the wound as normal and if you are a keen swimmer you can restart then.

Flying should be avoided for four weeks following surgery.

You should not dye or perm your hair for 3 months.

We advise you to avoid all activities that might cause a blow to the head, (eg. rugby, football and boxing) as these could potentially cause damage to the implant. Also, we advise against doing such activities as scuba diving as the pressure changes involved in deep water diving could damage the implant.

### **Are there any complication / risks to the surgery?**

You may get some dizziness and / or sickness for a few days after the operation. These symptoms can also occur if you turn your head quickly or bend down suddenly. This is usually temporary.

It is likely that some people find their taste is impaired on one side of their tongue. This usually improves gradually over time.

It is possible that the wound may become swollen and painful which may be a sign it has become infected. In the unlikely event that this happens you would be treated with antibiotics. With a serious infection the implant may have to be removed but this is a rare occurrence. You should contact the cochlear implant office on 020 7915 1301 for further advice.

Facial nerve bruising: This nerve (which runs near the site of surgery) is carefully monitored throughout the operation. This ensures that bruising or damage of the facial nerve rarely occurs.

Implant breakdown in the future: in this case a further operation would be necessary to replace it is a rare occurrence.

If the implant has to be removed it will not be possible to go back to using a hearing aid in that ear.

Rarely, people notice a change in their tinnitus. It may get louder or it may disappear altogether. It will usually return to normal levels after a few weeks.