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Cochlear Implants FAQ

Read this section to get answers to your questions about cochlear implants.

Learn the answers to common questions about cochlear implants on this page. Or go to our [Cochlear Implants](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/tech/ci/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/tech/ci/>) page to learn the basics of CIs.

About cochlear implants

Q. Is there a way for me to find out what my child actually "hears" through the CI?

A. The sound that your child "hears" with a CI is not the same as what you hear. This is because the CI changes the sound into electrical pulses that it sends to the brain. Some people describe the sound as "buzzing". Your child then has to learn what the sounds mean. Click on [simulations](http://www.bsos.umd.edu/hesp/zeng/simulations.html) (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/hesp/zeng/simulations.html>) to hear the sounds that your child might hear with her CI.

Q. Is it true that the surgery for a CI destroys all the hearing that is left in that ear?

A. Most of the time. The surgery involves putting a thin flexible coil into the inner ear. This coil usually damages the hair cells. When a child has a [sensorineural hearing loss](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/sensorineural.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/sensorineural.jsp>), the hair cells aren't working right anyway. The surgery doesn't hurt the nerves that send messages to the brain. The CI sends sounds to the brain without using the hair cells. Newer CIs are being made that cause less damage to any hair cells that may still be working.

Q. If my child decides she doesn't like it, can we have it taken out?

A. An implant is rarely removed surgically unless it is causing a medical problem.

Getting a cochlear implant

Q. Are there different types of cochlear implants?

A. There are 3 types that are used in the United States. They have all been approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). The 3 in the U.S. are the [Nucleus](http://www.cochlear.com/) (<http://www.cochlear.com/>), the [Clarion](http://www.bionicear.com/) (<http://www.bionicear.com/>) and the [MedE](http://www.medel.com/) (<http://www.medel.com/>) devices. They are made differently and use different computer programs to turn sounds into the electric impulses that are sent to the brain.

Q. Which type of implant should we choose?

A. Your implant team may like one type better than another. Or you may be asked to decide which one to get. All 3 implants work well. You may like certain features of one more than another. Learn about all 3 types of implants by talking to your CI team and reading about the devices on the websites. Read the books listed at the end of this page for more help.

Q. What is the best age for getting a cochlear implant?

A. Younger children tend to do best. This is because their brains are still learning how to hear. They are also still learning language. So if they are able to hear more it should help them learn language and speech better. Older children who get cochlear implants may also learn to hear a lot more. This may help them talk and understand what other people say.

Q. Can children with other problems get a cochlear implant?

A. Some children with blindness have gotten cochlear implants. If a child has disabilities such as [autism](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/autism/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/autism/>), [cerebral palsy](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/cp/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/cp/>), or mental retardation, he may not get as much benefit from the implant. The implant team should include professionals who know a lot about these conditions. The team will consider how the child is getting along, and how much support he will have at home and school with the implant. They may recommend an implant but want to make sure the parents don't expect too much.

Q. My child has a cochlea that didn't develop right. Can she still get a cochlear implant?

A. Some children are born with no cochlea. They can not get a C.I. Other children have a cochlea, but it hasn't formed the right way. This is called a Mondini deformity. These children can still get implants.

Q. Will my child get an implant in both ears?

A. No, not now. Surgery is only done on one ear. The surgeon will decide which ear to implant. Usually it is the ear that has the worst hearing loss. In the future, surgeons may put cochlear implants in both ears.

Q. How do we decide which ear should be implanted?

A. This depends on many factors:

- The amount of hearing loss in each ear
- Any damage to the ear which can be seen on the CT scan
- The family's or child's wishes

If both ears have the same hearing loss, some doctors will want to implant the right ear. This is because many people understand speech a little better with the right ear.

Q. My child is 10 years old and has been deaf since birth. Is it too late to get a CI?

A. If your child has learned language, a CI may give him some extra sound awareness. This may help him hear some sounds and improve his speech and understanding. But he may not speak or understand speech as well as a child who was implanted earlier. He will have missed out on hearing speech when he was young. This is the most important time for language development. Some centers won't implant children who are this old. If this happens, ask your CI center or audiologist to refer you to another center for a second opinion.

Paying for a cochlear implant

Q. How can I get help in paying for an implant?

A. Most insurance companies now pay for implants. If your insurance company says it won't pay for it, ask if you can appeal their decision. In some states there are special insurance policies for children whose families can't afford an implant or don't have insurance that will cover it.

Medicaid will cover the cost of the CI for your child if you qualify for Medicaid. Ask your cochlear implant team to help you get help paying for the implant.

Living with a cochlear implant

Q. Can my child continue to wear a hearing aid on the ear without an implant?

A. Yes. But at first your child should have a lot of practice listening with the implant alone. This is so your child will learn to listen only with the CI. The sounds your child hears with a hearing aid will be different from what he hears with a CI. At first, this could be confusing for your child.

Wearing a hearing aid on the ear without the implant may make sounds louder, or more balanced. It may also help a child tell where a sound is coming from. An older child can tell you whether the hearing aid helps.

Q. Will using sign language slow my child's learning how to hear and speak?

A. Many people have asked this question. There is no evidence to prove that using sign language will slow learning speech and language. Many children with cochlear implants use sign language. But they still need to work very hard to learn to use their hearing.

Q. Will my child still need special services at school?

A. Probably, especially if she is in a classroom with hearing children. Hearing therapy will be needed for months or even years. Your child may need a speech and language therapist, too. Even if she makes good grades, a hearing or speech professional should see her regularly and consult with the teacher to see how she is doing.

Q. Can my child participate in sports if he has a cochlear implant?

A. Yes. Some parents prefer that their child avoid contact sports such as football or hockey. They worry that a blow to the head could damage to the implant. If your child plays sports that might cause head injury, he should at least always wear a helmet. He should also wear a helmet when riding a bike, rollerblading, or skateboarding. If your child wants to swim, he will have to take off the sound processor when he is in the pool.

Q. Should my child wear the headpiece when she is sleeping?

A. No. There is no reason for her to be hearing when she's asleep. The magnet could easily fall off and become damaged or lost. If you are concerned about your child hearing a fire alarm, or alarm clock, get an alarm that vibrates or flashes bright lights.

Q. My child cries when we turn the CI on. What could that mean?

A. At first, she may cry because she feels something that is new and different. It may be scary to her. If her crying continues, it could mean she is getting too much electricity from the CI. This is like getting a mild shock. Or it could mean the sounds are too loud. When your audiologist "maps" the CI, she tries to make it so your child can hear the soft sounds but the loud sounds aren't too loud. It takes many visits during the first year of wearing the implant to set the map properly. Your child may be crying for other reasons, too. For example, if you turn on the CI before heading out the door, your child may get upset because you are leaving.

Q. I heard that a child should remove his CI if he is playing in a playground. Why is that?

A. The problem is that with some playground equipment, like a plastic slide, static electricity builds up. Then, when your child touches something metal, he might get a shock. The shock can damage the CI. It usually only affects the speech processor worn outside the body. This is less of a problem with newer CIs. Another danger is that your child could lose the magnet on the playground.

Q. My child has a CI but she isn't talking yet and can't imitate sounds. How can I tell if the CI is working?

A. Your audiologist can check your child's CI to see if it is working properly. Your child may also show signs that it isn't working. He may not make eye contact or respond to you when you talk to him.

Learning about cochlear implants

Q. Where can I find out more about cochlear implants?

A. Here are some suggestions

- Talk to your CI team, your audiologist, and other professionals who work with your child.
- Talk to parents of kids who have gotten implants and parents of kids who haven't gotten implants.
- Read this book: [The Parents' Guide to Cochlear Implants](http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/bookpage/PGCIbookpage.html) (<http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/bookpage/PGCIbookpage.html>) by Patricia M. Chute and Mary Ellen Nevins.
- Read [Navigating a Forest of Information: One Tree at a Time](http://clercenter2.gallaudet.edu/KidsWorldDeafNet/e-docs/CI/index.html) by Debra Nussbaum (<http://clercenter2.gallaudet.edu/KidsWorldDeafNet/e-docs/CI/index.html>). You can read it on the website or print it out.

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/tech/ci/faq.jsp>