South Tees Hospitals NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Expectations of your child's cochlear implant

The Team around your child

Following implantation and subsequent switch on, both you and your child will receive lots of help and support from an array of different people in order for your child to get the most from their cochlear implant. Each team member will play a different role for your child and these professionals usually consist of:

- Ear Nose and Throat Consultant
- Audiologist
- Cochlear Implant Keyworker
- Teacher of the Deaf
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Technical support from the company whom have provided your child's cochlear implant

What should you expect your child to hear?

Implant teams routinely counsel parents of children to have 'realistic expectations' about what their child may be able to hear with a cochlear implant, particularly in the initial phases of 'tuning'. People with an implant will hear varying amounts of sound and speech and how much they are able to hear will depend on factors such as length of deafness, cause of deafness, how often the child has worn hearing aids previously and/or how often they wear their cochlear implant processors and whether the child has other additional needs. These factors will have all been discussed prior to implantation.

How much should the implant be used?

We encourage parents to help their children wear their processors all of their waking hours and in as many different listening situations as possible. Gradually, over the first few weeks and months, your child will make steady progress. This may take more or less time than you expected and also the rate of improvement may vary. Sometimes your child may make a lot of progress in a short time and other times you will feel their progress may be slowing down.

How do we monitor your child's cochlear implant use?

We are able to monitor how often your child is wearing their processor and in what situations and also how many times the magnet may become disconnected from their head through the cochlear implant software in order to support you to maximise their use.

Cochlear implant usage is the most important factor for a child's progress.

How quickly can you fine tune the processor?

Generally, it takes longer to be able to fine tune a baby's cochlear implant than an older child as their responses are more difficult to gauge and they have a shorter concentration span for testing. It is common to only be able to programme or test one ear at a time during tuning sessions until we have reached a stable programme or the child has reached an age where they can focus on a task for a longer period of time. Tuning sessions can be very long and so short breaks for your child are often provided in order to maximise the amount of tuning and testing we can achieve in one session. We can also arrange shorter appointments within close succession if this is more appropriate for your child.

For older children, we are usually able to fine tune their programmes more quickly and they can also tell us what it sounds like in order for us to make helpful changes.

What if other people are expecting my child to hear everything clearly and quickly?
Few people understand about cochlear implants. Sometimes, family members and friends may expect that the implant will restore your child's hearing to normal. Other people may or may not be interested to learn more about the cochlear implant. Either way, it may help if you arrange a meeting to show people the device and discuss how it works and what your child may be able to hear with it. This way, you will be able to educate them about how they can help communication between them and your child.
In addition, your Keyworker and/or Teacher of the Deaf may arrange a visit to your child's nursery/school in order to show them how your child's cochlear implant processors work and also basic troubleshooting so they know how to replace batteries and faulty components.

How can I help improve what my child hears with the implant?
Helping your child to learn and understand the sound they hear through the implant takes time, patience and perseverance. Each child will develop their listening skills at their own pace. Over the first few months of implant use, as well as wearing the processors as much as possible and having the implant programmed, your child will have appointments with their Cochlear Implant Keyworker, Teacher of the Deaf and possibly an additional speech and language therapist. These sessions will focus on hearing and listening skills. It is extremely important that both you and your child play an active role in these sessions and practice their techniques in your everyday routines to facilitate your child to become acclimatised to an array of both speech and environmental sounds. This will help to improve their hearing and listening skills in different environments and help them to develop speech and language.

If you are concerned about the progress for your child at any stage, please talk to a member of the implant team.

USEFUL LISTENING TACTICS

1. Use your face and eyes
Make sure that your child can see your face when you are talking to them. Parts of speech may be heard with the cochlear implant and part of it they may be able to lipread or deduce from facial expression.
Try to position yourself so that the light falls on your face. Explain to people who are talking to your child that it helps to be able to see them when they are talking.

2. The communication environment
The physical environment both at home or when in nursery/school can make a difference to how easy or difficult it is to hear what people are saying to your child. For example a room with lots of hard surfaces (tiled floor, no soft furnishings) will generally be more challenging to hear in compared to one with carpets, table cloths, soft chairs, curtains etc. This is because sound waves just bounce around on hard surfaces and can give an echo-like sound quality. This can be made even more difficult if there is also a high ceiling.

Background sound and music can also make a more challenging listening environment as these sounds will mask quieter sounds and speech.

If you notice that communication is better or worse than usual in any situation try looking around to find out why this may be so.