

# Ear Surgery

Otoplasty



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF  
PLASTIC SURGEONS®

# What is Ear Surgery?

Ear surgery, or otoplasty, is a cosmetic procedure that can improve the appearance of the ears by altering their shape, position, or proportion. It can be used to correct a variety of issues, including ears that protrude too far from the head, ears that are overly large, or ears that have been misshapen due to injury.

## **Specifically ear surgery can treat:**

- Overly large ears—a rare condition called macrotia
- Protruding ears that occur on one or both sides in varying degrees

The procedure is highly individualized, and your plastic surgeon will work with you to create a treatment plan that addresses your specific concerns and goals. It's important to have realistic expectations about what ear surgery can and cannot achieve.

## **Children who are good candidates for ear surgery are:**

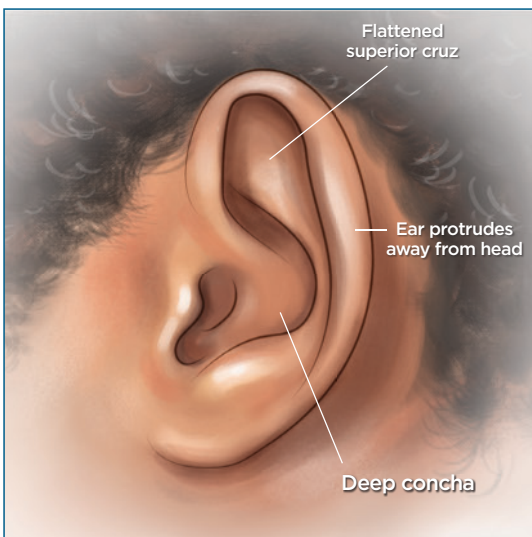
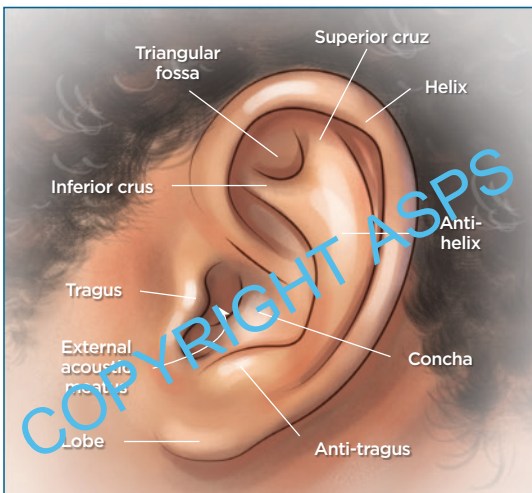
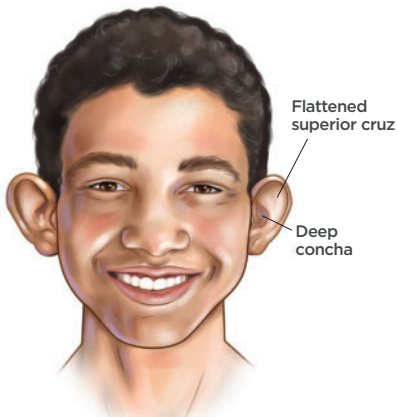
- Healthy, without a life-threatening illness or untreated chronic ear infections
- Generally five years of age or older, or when a child's ear cartilage is stable enough for correction
- Cooperative and follow instructions well
- Able to communicate their feelings and do not voice objections when surgery is discussed

## **Teenagers and adults who are good candidates for ear surgery are:**

- Healthy individuals who do not have a life-threatening illness or medical conditions that can impair healing
- Non-smokers
- Individuals with a positive outlook and specific goals in mind for ear surgery

## Ear Anatomy

Before



# Consultation & Preparing for Surgery

## Be prepared to discuss the following during your consultation:

- Your reasons for wanting to have surgery, your expectations, and your desired outcome
- Your medical conditions and previous medical treatments
- Your current medications and drug allergies; any vitamins or herbal supplements you take; and any alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or drug use
- Any questions or concerns you have about ear surgery from your own research

## Your plastic surgeon will also:

- Evaluate your general health status and any preexisting health conditions or risk factors
- Take photographs for your medical records
- Discuss your options and recommend a course of treatment
- Discuss the possible outcomes of ear surgery, as well as any risks or potential complications
- Discuss the use of anesthesia during your ear surgery



Ear surgery may be performed in an accredited outpatient facility, an ambulatory surgical center, or a hospital. Prior to surgery, you may be asked to:

- Have a physical examination, including lab work
- Take certain medications or adjust your current medications
- Stop smoking or vaping\*
- Avoid taking aspirin and certain anti-inflammatory drugs, as they can increase bleeding

*\*Smoking decreases blood flow, which can impede wound healing and increase the risk of infection.*

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Be sure to ask your plastic surgeon questions. It's very important to understand all aspects of your ear surgery, especially regarding your personal health history. It's natural to feel some anxiety, whether it's excitement for your anticipated new look or a bit of preoperative stress. Don't be shy about discussing these feelings with your plastic surgeon.

# The Procedure

## Step 1 - Anesthesia

During the procedure, your plastic surgeon will create an incision behind the ear, which allows access to the cartilage. The cartilage is then reshaped or removed, depending on the desired outcome. The procedure can be performed under local anesthesia with sedation or under general anesthesia, depending on the complexity of the surgery.

## Step 2 - The incision

Correction of protruding ears typically involves surgical techniques to create or increase the antihelical fold, which is just inside the rim of the ear. This reduces enlarged conchal cartilage, which is the largest and deepest concavity of the external ear.

During the procedure, incisions are generally made on the back surface of the ear, where they are hidden from view. In some cases, incisions may be necessary on the front of the ear, but they are made within its folds to minimize their visibility. The type and location of the incisions will depend on the specific needs of the patient.

Once the incisions are made, the plastic surgeon will access the cartilage and use specialized techniques to reshape it. This may involve removing some of the cartilage or folding it to create the desired shape. Internal, non-removable sutures are used to secure the newly shaped cartilage in place.

## Step 3 - Closing the incisions

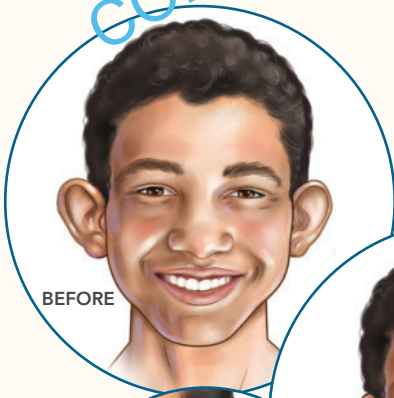
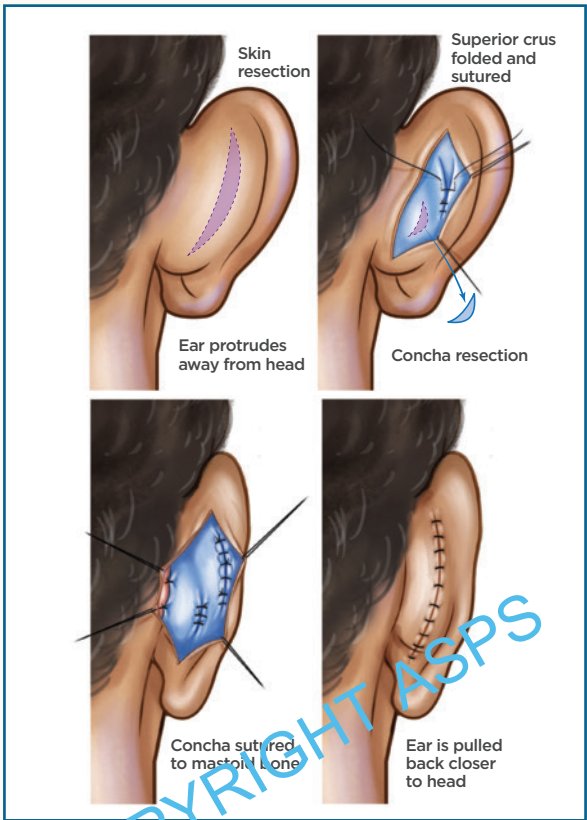
Once the reshaping of the cartilage is complete, external stitches are used to close the incisions. Your plastic surgeon will use techniques that are individualized to your specific needs, taking care not to distort other structures and to avoid an unnatural “pinned back” appearance.

## Step 4 - See the results

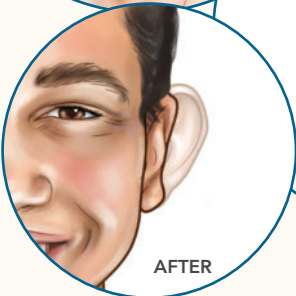
Ear surgery offers near-immediate results in cases of protruding ears. Once the dressings are removed, the difference in appearance is typically visible right away. With the ear permanently positioned closer to the head, the result is a more balanced and aesthetically pleasing appearance to the face.

Surgical scars from the incisions are typically well-hidden either behind the ear or in the natural creases of the ear, and will fade over time.

## Ear Surgery Procedure



### Results



# Risks & Safety

The decision to have ear surgery is extremely personal. You will have to decide if the benefits will achieve your goals and if the risks and potential complications are acceptable.

You may be asked to sign a consent form to ensure that you fully understand the procedure and any risks and potential complications. You should feel free to ask any questions to help you understand those risks.





## **Risks can include:**

- Anesthesia risks
- Bleeding
- Infection
- Poor wound healing
- Change in skin sensation
- Asymmetry
- Pain, which may persist
- Unfavorable scarring
- Possibility of revisional surgery
- Allergies to tape, suture materials, glues, blood products, topical preparations or injected agents

All risks will be fully discussed prior to your consent. It is important that you address all your questions directly with your plastic surgeon.

After surgery, bandages or dressings will be applied to keep your surgical site clean, protect it from trauma and to support the new position of the ear during initial healing.

## **When you go home**

Should any complications occur, notify your plastic surgeon who will determine if any additional treatment is needed.

## **Be careful**

Following your physician's instructions is key to the success of your surgery. It is important that the surgical incisions are not subjected to excessive force, abrasion, or motion during the time of healing. Your doctor will give you specific instructions on how to care for yourself.

# Recovery & Results

After otoplasty, or ear surgery, the ears will be in a new position that is closer to the head, resulting in a more balanced and aesthetically pleasing appearance to the face. The results of the procedure are typically long-lasting, with the ears maintaining their new shape and position. Scarring from the incisions will continue to fade over time, and any residual swelling or bruising will subside within a few weeks.

**Be sure to ask your plastic surgeon specific questions about what you can expect during your individual recovery period.**

- Where will I be taken after my surgery is complete?
- What medication will I be given or prescribed after surgery?
- Will I have dressings/bandages after surgery?
- When will they be removed?
- When can I resume normal activity and exercise?
- When do I return for follow-up care?

After ear surgery, it's normal for the ears to take some time to settle into their new position and you may notice changes in their appearance during this time. Your plastic surgeon will set realistic expectations for the recovery process and provide guidance on caring for your ears after surgery.

While good results are expected from ear surgery, there is no guarantee of optimal results with a single procedure. The practice of medicine and surgery is not an exact science, and in some cases, additional surgery may be necessary to achieve the desired outcome.

### Recovery Period

### What to expect

Week 1

- Wear a dressing or bandage to protect the ears
- Some discomfort, swelling, and bruising is normal
- Avoid strenuous activity or heavy lifting

Week 2

- Dressing or bandage is removed and the incision site is checked
- Swelling and bruising begin to subside
  - May be able to return to work or school

Week 3

- Resume normal activities, including exercise
- Any remaining swelling or bruising continues to improve
- May still need to wear a headband or supportive device during sleep

Week 4+

- Resume all normal activities without restrictions
- Scarring from incisions will continue to fade over time
- Follow-up appointments with plastic surgeon to monitor healing

# Cost

Prices for ear surgery can vary. A surgeon's cost may be based on their experience, the type of procedure used, and geographic office location.

## Cost may include:

- Anesthesia fees
- Hospital or surgical facility costs
- Medical tests
- Post-surgery garments
- Prescriptions for medication
- Surgeon's fee

Many health insurance plans do not cover ear surgery, as it is considered cosmetic surgery. Please ask your surgeon for a complete picture of the costs you can expect for your ear surgery. Many plastic surgeons offer patient financing plans.

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## Your satisfaction involves more than a fee:

When choosing a plastic surgeon for ear surgery, remember that the surgeon's experience and your comfort with them are just as important as the final cost of the surgery.

# Words to know

- **Antihelical fold:** A fold that is just inside the rim of the ear.
- **Conchal cartilage:** The largest and deepest concavity of the external ear.
- **Constricted ear:** Also called a lop or cup ear, it has varying degrees of protrusion, reduced ear circumference, folding or flattening of the upper helical rim, and lowered ear position.
- **Cryptotia:** Also called hidden ear, it occurs when the upper rim of the ear is buried beneath a fold of scalp secondary to abnormal folding of the upper ear cartilage toward the head. The folding is the reverse of that commonly seen in the protruding ear.
- **Ear axis:** The main line of ear growth.
- **General anesthesia:** Drugs and/or gases used during an operation to relieve pain and alter consciousness.
- **Intravenous sedation:** Sedatives administered by injection into a vein to help you relax.
- **Macrotia:** Overly large ears; a rare condition.
- **Microtia:** The most complex congenital ear deformity when the outer ear appears as either a sausage-shaped structure resembling little more than the earlobe, or has more recognizable parts of the concha and tragus or other normal ear features. It may or may not be missing the external auditory or hearing canal. Hearing is impaired to varying degrees.
- **Otoplasty:** Ear surgery to improve the shape, position, or proportion of the ear.
- **Stahl's ear:** An ear that is distorted in shape due to an abnormal fold of cartilage.

# Questions to ask my plastic surgeon

- Are you certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery?
- Are you a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons?
- Were you trained specifically in the field of plastic surgery?
- How many years of plastic surgery training have you had?
- Do you have hospital privileges to perform this procedure? If so, at which hospitals?
- Is the office-based surgical facility accredited by a nationally- or state-recognized accrediting agency, or is it state-licensed or Medicare-certified?
- Am I a good candidate for this procedure?
- What will be expected of me to get the best results?
- Where and how will you perform my procedure?
- What surgical technique is recommended for me?
- How long of a recovery period can I expect, and what kind of help will I need during my recovery?
- What are the risks and complications associated with my procedure?
- How are complications handled?
- What are my options if I am dissatisfied with the outcome?
- Do you have before-and-after photos I can look at for this procedure and what results are reasonable for me?

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# Make the Right Choice

Plastic surgery involves many choices. The first and most important is selecting a member of the **American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS)**.

## **ASPS member surgeons meet rigorous standards:**

- Board certification by the American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS)<sup>®</sup> or in Canada by The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada<sup>®</sup>
- Complete at least six years of surgical training following medical school with a minimum of three years of plastic surgery residency training
- Pass comprehensive oral and written exams
- Graduate from an accredited medical school
- Complete continuing medical education, including patient safety each year
- Perform surgery in accredited, state-licensed, or Medicare-certified surgical facilities

## **Do not be confused by other official-sounding boards and certifications.**

The ABPS is recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), which has approved medical specialty boards since 1934. There is no ABMS-recognized certifying board with “cosmetic surgery” in its name. By choosing a member of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, you can be assured that you are choosing a qualified, highly trained plastic surgeon who is board certified by the ABPS or The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.



## AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLASTIC SURGEONS®

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