



# EARS—THEY'RE ABOUT MORE THAN HEARING

## Otoplasty for Prominent Ears

At **any age**—adult or child—prominent ears (“**Dumbo ears**”) can be **upsetting**, even **humiliating**

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*As I tied my long blonde hair into a bun  
I thought that night I would have lots of fun.*

*I wore a pretty dress with sequins of pink  
Then I looked in the mirror to see what I think.*

*And as I did my eyes filled with tears  
Because all I could see were my very large ears.*

*I went to the doctor and asked: “What I should do?”  
He said “I can fix this; I’ve done quite a few.”*

*The next week I went, filled with all my fears  
And I left with a smile and my brand new ears.*

*And now, as I look in the mirror, all that I see  
Is a wonderful person .....Me!*

Victoria

Ears do more than gather sounds—they frame our faces. And like any frame, the ears are meant to complement what’s inside. When positioned naturally, ears tend to be little noticed and gain attention only by way of the jewelry adorning them or the glasses they support. But when they are out of sync with the rest of the facial balance, problems begin.

Most of the problems relate to what are called prominent ears, often nicknamed “Dumbo ears,” “floppy ears,” or “Mickey Mouse ears.” These unfortunate terms have been directed toward the child whose ears extend beyond their normal position and begin a firestorm of emotional angst.

There are those who believe that children born with protruding ears are “funny but cute” and that they will eventually “grow into them.” Others believe that by taping the ears back, growth can be favorably influenced. All not true!

The truth is that children with prominent ears can be placed under significant psychological stress by the torment of other children who take delight in ridicule. The uncanny ability of playmates and peers to pick out an abnormal feature and use it for amusement begins at school age. Fortunately, this period between five and seven is when the ear has reached full growth and is ideal for surgical correction.

There is no need for teenagers to “Krazy Glue” their ears back—yes, I have seen it! Many of the feelings of self-consciousness and insecurity can be carried forward from childhood and have profound effects on self-esteem.

Analysis is important when it comes to otoplasty (the operation that corrects such ears) because not every

*I was made fun of at school  
They called me a fool.*

*But that all changed  
When my ears were rearranged*

*Genevieve*

child has the same problem. Most have ears that are cup shaped because of a lack of normal architecture. Missing is the vertical fold of the cartilage near the curled edge. Pressing the ear back to the side of the head reveals this *ante-helical fold*. Other ears may have large, deep

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bowls—the conchae. And others may have issues with the lobes. Once the work plan is made, the plan can be made to work.

Otoplasty is a relatively painless procedure. It is often performed on an outpatient basis, either with general anesthesia or local anesthesia with sedation, depending on the patient’s age and level of cooperation.

Although there are several approaches to this problem, the one most employed involves an incision behind the ear. This places the scar in an inconspicuous position

## **OTOPLASTY IS A RELATIVELY PAINLESS PROCEDURE, OFTEN PERFORMED ON AN OUTPATIENT BASIS**

in the groove between the ear and the side of the head. Once the cartilage is exposed, adjustments are made to remove cartilage or to weaken it to allow it to be folded back with stitches. If there is any excess skin behind the ear, it is removed prior to closure of the incision.

Following surgery, the head is wrapped with a fluffy bandage to cover and protect the ears. After a few days, this is removed and replaced with a headband placed over the ears for additional protection during the healing phase. This is typically for one month. Mild oral pain medication is often all that is needed. School can be re-

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**IMAGE 27**