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Pinnaplasty: General Information

Procedure time	1.5 hours
General/local anaesthetic	local
Number of nights in hospital	Day case
Time off work	2-4 weeks
Back to normality/sports	4-6 weeks
Back to Driving	2-4 weeks
Showering / Bath	10 days / straight away

Introduction and Indications

Surgery to reshape the ear is a common plastic surgery procedure and is done to reshape, straighten, or rebuild any aspect of the ear.

The most common request is to reduce the projection of the ear from the side of the head, in children or in adults of any age.

The Operation

Pinnaplasty can be carried out under general or local anaesthetic and may be done as day case surgery without an overnight stay in hospital. Mild painkillers are required after surgery, but the more common sensation is one of discomfort from the dressing, which is applied for a week and resembles a motorcycle helmet. Pinnaplasty scars are placed behind the ear, from which the surgeon can access the cartilage, and the skin of the ear 'envelope' Pinnaplasty surgery changes the subtle balance between the skin and cartilages of the ear, and each technique is chosen to meet individual aims. The cartilage is shaved, scored and refashioned to shape the ear and the skin is redraped on top, trimming to maintain the overall balance and projection of the ear. Sutures behind the ear are dissolving and excess knots or suture material are trimmed at 2-3 weeks. Dressings are removed 7-10 days. It takes several weeks thereafter for the swelling to subside and the fine architecture of the ear to recover. Temporary numbness of the ears is a common feature which gradually recovers. Head turning and bending are restricted for the first week to reduce bleeding and swelling risk. Minor bleeding and clots may occur and requires checking of the bandage to exclude haematoma and the risk of 'cauliflower ear'.

Recovery Period

The dressing is worn for 7 - 10 days. Itchiness and irritation from is common for a few days, and the dressing should be firm but not tight. Patients should keep a straight head and back as much as possible for the first week, avoiding bending and lifting, which cause a bleeding risk. The ears feel stiff and numb for a period of time, with normality returning finally at around 3 months.

Although there is no medical reason to stay away from work or driving for more than a few days, 7-10 off work is usually advised. Sporting activity is restricted for 3-4 weeks, and contact sports for six weeks, until healing has matured. There is no restriction on showering or bathing, but towelling off should be gentle.

Possible Complications

Patient satisfaction from pinnaplasty procedures is excellent. Complications are rare and simplified into time frames as follows:-

Early (within 48 hrs) – discomfort, uncomfortable dressings and rarely collection of blood clot under the skin which may need to be evacuated under Local Anaesthetic.

Intermediate (48 hrs to 2 weeks) – bruising, swelling

Late (2 weeks thereafter) – asymmetry (as the operation merely aims to correct the prominence and does not address the pre-existing asymmetry), recurrence of the problem (e.g. if knocked within first 6 weeks, one of the sutures may give way), lumpy, itchy scars, revision surgery