



Examples of abnormally shaped ears



Normal ear

Ear Splinting

Are you concerned about the shape of your baby's ear?

The outer ear is a complicated shape. Babies are commonly born with mildly abnormal ears. There is a wide range of ear shapes.

Why does my baby have an abnormal ear?

The outer ear starts to develop during the first trimester and continues to grow throughout the pregnancy. Factors that contribute to the shape of the ears include family history (genetics) and positioning within the uterus. In utero exposure to certain medications, such as Accutane (retinoic acid) may also affect the shape of the ear.

Are there any treatments for abnormal ears?

Families and children may seek surgical correction of abnormally shaped ears. Most surgeons recommend waiting until the child is at least 5 years old before performing surgery to change the shape of the ear.

Another approach is to start ear splinting when your child is a baby, ideally less than 6 weeks old.

What is ear splinting?

Ear splinting is a non-surgical way to treat abnormally shaped ears. Depending upon the baby's age and the shape of the ear we may recommend different types of splinting. We use a soft material to mold the ear into a more normal shape. It will then be secured using tape and a hat. We hope to permanently change the shape of the ear by maintaining the new shape for several months. There is also an ear splinting system called Earwell that we sometimes recommend. This may avoid the need for surgery in the future.

How long does ear splinting take?

The length of time depends on your baby's age and shape of the ear. Ear splints should be worn at all times, 24 hours a day. You can remove the splints several times a week to clean your baby's skin. The younger your baby is when ear splinting is started the shorter amount of time that is needed to correct the ear shape. Usually, it will take 1 to 3 months.

How do we start ear splinting?

You and your baby can schedule a visit with our nurse practitioner, in the Otolaryngology (ENT) Clinic at Seattle Children's Hospital. The nurse practitioner will examine your baby and review the results of their hearing screening.

To Learn More

- Otolaryngology Clinic
206-987-2105
- Ask your child's nurse
or doctor
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask
your child's nurse.
- From outside the
hospital, call the
toll-free Family
Interpreting Line
1-866-583-1527.
Tell the interpreter
the name or extension
you need.

At that visit, we will also create the splint and teach you how to keep the ear splinted. A follow-up appointment will be made 1 to 2 weeks later and then about once a month until splinting is no longer needed.

When your baby is 2 to 3 years old, they will be scheduled to see the doctor for an evaluation and hearing test.

Are there any risks to ear splinting?

Ear splinting can irritate the skin. Remove the splint every 2 to 3 days to clean it. This can help reduce discomfort. We will look for skin reactions at your child's follow-up visits. The major risk is that it may not improve how your child's ear looks.

Where can I get more information on ear splinting?

Initial consultation as well as all follow-up visits will be done in the Otolaryngology Clinic at Children's.

You can make an appointment by calling the Scheduling Center at 206-987-2105.