

# Ear Splinting

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## 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.

## Examples of abnormally shaped ears



## Typical ear



## 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 typical shape. It will then be secured using tape. 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.

### To Learn More

- Otolaryngology Clinic  
206-987-2105
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your 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.

### 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. 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 in the Otolaryngology (ENT) Clinic. The provider will examine your baby and discuss treatment options based on your baby's age and the appearance of their ears.

At that visit, we will create or place the splint or EarWell and teach you how to care for your baby's ears with it in place. Depending on what type of splinting your baby has, we will schedule a follow-up appointment 2 to 6 weeks later. If an EarWell is placed, we will schedule 3 more follow-up appointments, to take place over 6 weeks.

### 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.

If an EarWell is placed, you do not need to remove the material to clean the skin, unless you choose to do so the night before your follow-up appointment. We will remove the EarWell in clinic and clean the skin at that time.

### 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.