

Mastoid Surgery

Information for Parents and Carers

What is the mastoid?

The mastoid is the hard bit of bone you can feel behind the ear. The bone is full of airspaces like a honeycomb. These airspaces connect with the ear.

Why does my child need surgery on their ear and mastoid?

Your child's ear has a build up of skin cells and infection, which has eaten into the mastoid bone. This is the cause of the discharge they have been getting from their ear. The only way to remove this build up is surgery.

If the build up of skin cells is left it can damage the hearing, the organ of balance and the nerve that moves the muscles of the face. It can also cause problems with brain infections.

What is involved in mastoid surgery?

The operation takes up to 4 hours. Your child will be asleep under a general anaesthetic.

There will be a scar either behind or in front of your child's ear. Your Surgeon will discuss with you which your child is likely to have before the operation.

During the operation the ear is cleared of build up and then the bone is drilled out to clear the affected part.

Sometimes the ear is then packed with a dressing and a bandage is placed around your child's head to secure the dressing. The Surgeon will discuss this with you.

How will my child feel after the operation?

Sometimes your child will be well enough to go home on the day of the operation or the next day.

The bandage is removed the day after the operation.

The dressing in your child's ear will need to stay in place for a few weeks and will usually be removed in the ward treatment room or in clinic. It will make your child's hearing worse while it is in place. There will be cotton wool on top of the dressing, which you can replace if it falls out.

Some children feel dizzy or sick after mastoid surgery. This can be improved by medicines and usually settles quickly.

How long should my child be off school?

Your child should be able to go back to school 2 weeks following the operation.

Can there be problems?

Your child's hearing may be worse after the operation. Often this is because we have to remove the diseased bones from the ear in order to clean it out. Sometimes an operation at a later stage can improve the hearing. There is an extremely rare risk of more permanent damage or complete deafness.

Dizziness can occur after a mastoid operation because the ear is involved in balance. Usually the dizziness settles after a few days but in some cases it can take longer. The nerve that moves all the muscles of the face runs through the middle part of the ear and there is a small risk of damage to this during surgery.

Damage to this nerve causes weakness of the face on the same side as the operation. This complication is rare.

Occasionally there may be an altered sensation of taste from a small nerve that supplies the taste to the tongue, however most of our sense of taste comes from smell, which is unaffected.

After the operation the entrance to your child's ear and the part of the ear just inside will be larger, especially if there is a mastoid cavity. This is not usually noticeable to other people. Sometimes this cavity can cause problems with discharge and infection.

Is there any alternative to mastoid surgery?

Your child will probably have had their ear cleaned and had antibiotic drops. Often this is not enough to fully clear the disease. Surgery is the only way to get rid of the build up.

Most of the complications mentioned above can also occur with the disease if it is left.

If you have any problems or questions please contact your Surgeons Secretary

Royal Hospital for Children and Young People
50 Little France Crescent
Edinburgh EH16 4TJ
Tel.: 0131 536 1000

Mastoid Surgery – Before the Operation