

Your Child's Cochlear Implant: Before Surgery

When sound waves enter the inner ear, the cochlea uses special nerve cells to send signals to the brain.

The brain interprets the signals as recognizable sounds, such as words or music.

Some hearing problems happen when the special nerve cells in the cochlea are missing or damaged.

A cochlear implant is a small electronic device that helps the cochlea make sound.

It will not give your child normal hearing, and unlike hearing aids, a cochlear implant does not make sounds louder.

But it can improve how well your child speaks and understands speech.

A cochlear implant includes a microphone worn behind the ear, to pick up sound; a speech processor; and the implant device.

Before the surgery, your child will get medicine so they won't feel anything during the procedure.

Here's how it's done.

The doctor makes a small cut, called an incision, behind your child's ear.

The doctor places the device under the skin near the ear, and puts the tiny electrodes in the inner ear.

The incision will leave a scar that will fade.

And the implant may make a small bump under the skin behind the ear.

Your child's hearing will not change until the implant is turned on around 3 to 6 weeks later.

Most children go home the same day as the surgery or the next day.

They can go back to school or day care in about 1 week and back to normal activities in about 3 to 4 weeks.

At least 2 weeks before cochlear implant surgery, your child should have all required vaccinations.

That's because there is an increased risk of bacterial meningitis for children with cochlear implants.

Before the surgery, tell the doctors ALL the medicines and natural health products your child takes.

Some of these can increase the risk of bleeding or interact with anesthesia.

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Your doctor will tell you which medicines your child should take or stop before surgery.

And follow your doctor's directions for preparing your child, including when your child should stop eating and drinking.

Bring your photo ID and any other paperwork your hospital may have asked for.

Ask if you can bring a favorite toy or blanket to help comfort your child.

Surgery may be stressful for you and your child.

But knowing what to expect and how to prepare can help.

Recovery and healing take time.

But if you have any questions or concerns, you can always call your doctor.