

## PROSTHETIC EARS FACTSHEET

### **Q Is it true that you can now get realistic prosthetic ears?**

**A** Prosthetic ears offer an excellent alternative to complex and expensive ear reconstructive surgery. They look very real these days, and are matched closely to your skin tone so that they look perfectly natural. They are part of a wide range of prostheses for the face and are made by skilled professionals called anaplastologists.

There are two types of prosthetic ears. The first sticks to the skin using specially formulated, safe glue, and the second type is called an osteointegrated prosthesis. If you choose this type of ear, your surgeon will place several titanium implant posts into the bone around the ear and your ear will snap securely onto these implants.

Both types of ear are removable and should ideally be taken off each night and cleaned carefully – as well as the surrounding skin where the prosthesis ‘sits’.

You can occasionally sleep – and also swim – with a prosthetic ear in place, but this may affect the quality of the ear over time. As long as you do your research before getting your ear and work closely with the prosthetic team you’ll get an ear that no one will know is artificial – except you.

### **Q Are prosthetic ears available on the NHS - and can anyone have them?**

**A** Prosthetic ears are available on the NHS based on need. You will be asked about the impact ear deformities or lack of ears have on your life and will discuss the various options available to you with a consultant anaplastologist. If you are opting for the prosthetic approach it will be extremely difficult for you to have reconstructive ear surgery later so they will make sure that you are happy with prosthetics as the best way forward. In the vast majority of circumstances, prosthetic ears are available on the NHS, but in rare circumstances, for example, if you are transferred from one hospital to another for care, this can affect the funding and you may be required to pay for the ears yourself. If you are unsure, please speak to the department you have been referred to or ask the Trust for advice.

### **Q Can I get them made and fitted privately? How much will it cost?**

**A** If you want to have prosthetic ears made and fitted privately you can often find private anaplastologists based within hospitals. There are also private companies that specialise in ear prosthetics. Prices vary according to the amount of surgery you will need to have and the size and fixing of your prosthesis. All good anaplastologists will quote for a bespoke solution but you can expect to pay from £2,000 to £8,000.

### **Q Do most hospitals provide them? Or would I have to travel to a specialist centre?**

**A** Most Maxillofacial Prosthetics services are based in large regional UK Hospitals.

**As an NHS patient** - you will need a written referral from your doctor or relevant health professional (i.e. Specialist nurse, therapist, surgeon) to the nearest unit with a Maxillofacial Prosthetics service.

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If your local Maxillofacial Prosthetic unit does not provide the treatment you require then you can be transferred to a larger regional unit which delivers such care. As an NHS patient, treatments are free of charge.

**As a Private patient** - you'll need to speak to your surgeon or GP who will advise you. You can self-refer (go direct) to a unit of your choice and they will be able to help you with information on treatment options and costs. However you should be treated by an experienced member of staff. Ask them how long they have been providing the service (experience) and what types of prostheses they have made? They will be happy to help you.

The Institute of Maxillofacial Prosthetists and Technologists has a database of registered members hospital and clinic addresses throughout the UK, Europe and the rest of the world which you can view at <http://www.impt.co.uk/clinics.php>

### **Q Is there a long waiting list?**

**A** Waiting lists for prosthetic appointments and surgery vary depending on the hospital you wish to go to. Your doctor should be aware of the length of time you will have to wait for a consultation and you can enquire at individual clinics.

### **Q How do they make prosthetic ears?**

**A** Prosthetic ears are made in close consultation with the person getting them, to make sure they are the perfect skin tone and shape.

First of all the anaplastologist will take an impression of your most complete ear and create a wax model, to create the best shaping for the prosthetic ear and positioning of particular features (like how it might fit with the remaining ear or the best place to put the implants that will hold the prosthesis in place (if you are having them)). If you're having implants a second impression is taken of the ear, after they have healed, to work out where the gold bar will need to go to hold the prosthesis in place.

Once the wax model has been sculpted using one or more impression of your ear, the anaplastologist will make a final mould for the prosthesis and use carefully colour-matched silicone to make it. The whole process takes about 25 hours' work, some of which takes place with the recipient of the ear; most however takes place in the lab.

To learn more about how prosthetic ears are made you can watch this video on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJ5WfPrc7MY>

You may want to consider having a second pair of prosthetic ears made at the same time so that you have some for special occasions and for back-up.

### **Q How are prosthetic ears attached?**

**A** There are three ways that prosthetic ears can be attached:-

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By using **medical glue** - special glues that will work effectively with the material of the prosthesis (usually silicone) and can be used easily to stick the ear in place. The anaplastologist will advise you about attaching and detaching your prosthesis using glue – it soon becomes an easy part of your routine, like flossing your teeth.

By having a **prosthesis made which fits around the pre-existing ear structure** and ‘fills in the gaps’ – this is called anatomical retention. You will be shown how to put this firmly in place.

By having **implants fitted** in the bones of your ears that will create a firm foundation for your prosthesis and enable you to clip it into place. Implants are small titanium structures that are implanted through a minor surgical procedure to fuse with the bone in your ear, and will give your prosthesis a firm foundation. Before the prosthesis can be made and fitted you will have to wait for the implants to heal - this usually takes two to three months.

### **Q Can I remove them myself?**

**A** Keeping prosthetic ears clean is essential – not just for hygiene purposes, but also to ensure that they remain in good condition and last as long as possible.

When your prosthesis is fitted you will be shown how to attach and remove it and will be given instructions on how to clean and maintain it. It is easy to do and you’ll soon get used to it. You can sleep or swim with your prosthesis in place but it will affect how long it stays in tip-top condition.

You might want to remove your prosthesis if you’re taking part in sport or strenuous activity to avoid it getting dislodged or damaged.

If you have your hair dyed it is also recommended that you remove your prostheses to avoid them getting stained or discoloured.

### **Q Do I have to undergo surgery to have prosthetic ears? What’s involved?**

**A** You only have to undergo surgery for your prosthetic ear(s) if you’re having an osteointegrated prosthesis which requires implants. Not everyone is suitable for implants – it depends on the strength and condition of the bone and tissues in your ear – and a preliminary examination will determine whether you can have them.

The implants are inserted in a minor operation (usually day surgery) which can be done under local or general anaesthetic. They are then left to heal for two to three months before you can go on to the next stage, when, screw posts and/or a gold bar will be fitted to the outside of the ear site, under local anaesthetic, to secure the ear.

If you’re having adhesive-attached prostheses there is no surgery involved, just a number of visits to the anaplastologist to have impressions taken and model ears fitted before the final prosthesis is made.

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### **Q** What are the risks?

**A** Having a prosthetic ear(s) constructed and fitted is relatively low-risk. The risks to you, individually, posed by anaesthetics used in surgery, will be carefully assessed if you're having osteointegrated prostheses, and the procedures involved can be performed under either general or local anaesthetic.

There are no reported failure rates for the osteointegrated approach to ear prosthetics.

The other, minor, risk is skin infection, either as a result of the procedures involved, or due to poor hygiene and care of the prostheses used. Infection is easily treatable but, when you're wearing your prostheses, should be prevented by regular and thorough cleaning of the prostheses and the skin around the ear, especially when glues are used.

### **Q** How long do prosthetic ears last?

**A** The life of a prosthetic ear can vary immensely; typically from one to three years, but some ears can last for over five, six or seven years. It depends on the material used to make the ear and how well you take care of it.

### **Q** Can I have prosthetic ears if I use a hearing aid?

**A** If everything is present in your middle ear – i.e. the ear canal, ear drum and bones are present – and you wear a hearing aid there is no reason why it cannot be fitted around your prosthetic ear. You may need to have one made especially tailored to your prosthesis but this will be available to you on the NHS.

If you have Microtia (were born with an underdeveloped ear or ears) you may well have been fitted with a BAHA (bone anchored hearing aid) which uses the vibration of the bone to conduct sound. You can still wear a hearing aid but the BAHA will need to accommodate your prosthetic ear implants if you are having them. You will need to take advice from the specialist at your BAHA clinic.

### **Q** Can I wear pierced earrings in my prosthetic ear(s)?

**A** Yes. But if you plan to wear pierced earrings, you should discuss this with your anaplastologist so that they can make permanent holes in your prosthetic ears when they are being made for you.

### **Q** Where can I get more information?

**A** If you need more information about prosthetic ears, contact the Health & Wellbeing team on 01480 474074 or email [michelle-jane.robinson@thalidomidetrust.org](mailto:michelle-jane.robinson@thalidomidetrust.org). We may be able to put you in touch with another beneficiary who has had prosthetic ears fitted recently so that you can ask questions about their experience.