

ears

correcting prominent ears

Sydney facial plastic surgeon **Dr Shahram Shahidi** spoke with Elise Eggleton about a procedure to correct protruding ears.

You may not think of ears as an important beauty attribute but they do have an impact on overall appearance,' says Sydney facial plastic surgeon Dr Shahram Shahidi. 'Ears that are out of proportion with the rest of the face can draw too much attention, marring the appearance of other more attractive facial features.'

'Many people with protruding ears often learn to hide them from a young age, be it with a hat or hairstyles, to avoid unkind remarks, particularly in the school playground. And while most children with prominent ears grow into well-adjusted adults, few would say they are glad it happened. That's where ear surgery, or otoplasty, can help.'

Ear surgery is usually performed as an outpatient procedure. Surgery generally takes about one to two hours, although complicated procedures may take longer.

Most ear surgery is performed on patients aged between five and 14, while cartilage is still soft. Ears are

almost fully grown by the age of five or six.

'Most ear problems are genetic. Ears begin to take shape early in pregnancy. By the time of birth, a baby's ears have gone through a complex configuration that gives the ears their characteristics, folds and shape,' says Dr Shahidi.

Adult ear surgery is also possible, and there are generally no additional risks associated with ear surgery on an older patient. However, Dr Shahidi says that many studies have shown there are psychological benefits to having ear surgery performed earlier. 'Some studies have shown there may be an emotional benefit to having ear surgery earlier, before the commencement of school,' says Dr Shahidi.

Ear surgery has been around since 1845, with over 200 reported techniques being used. These include the removal of skin from behind the ears, the weakening of cartilage, the cutting and removal of cartilage, cartilage moulding and

the rotation of the ear by special suture. Results have been varied.

'During ear surgery these days, incisions are made behind the ears, which can easily be hidden in the natural fold,' explains Dr Shahidi. 'Excess skin and cartilage are removed and the folds of the ear are sculpted. Sutures are used to keep the ear in the ideal position.'

Even when only one ear appears to protrude, surgery is usually performed on both ears for a better balance.

According to Dr Shahidi, the ideal ear can take a variety of shapes and sizes. 'The way your ears affect your appearance is determined primarily by the way they harmonise with your face,' he says. 'Most people prefer ears that lie close to the head and extend from the level of the brow to the base of the nose.'

Post surgery, a soft, padded bandage is usually worn around the head to protect the ears and hold them in place for one week. Once the bandage is removed, a light headband can be worn at night for a few more weeks.

Dr Shahidi says ear surgery is not a particularly painful

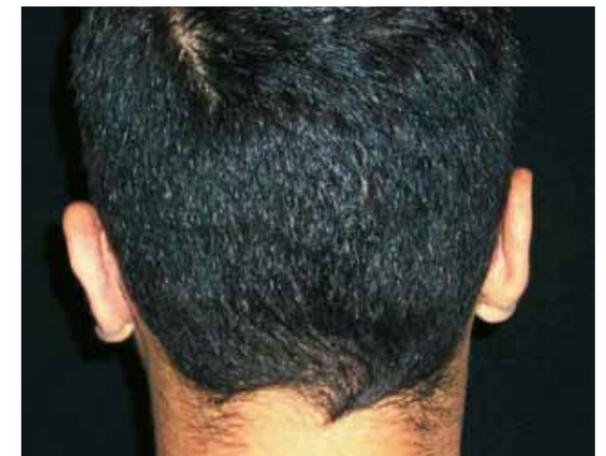
operation, with most people returning to work or school in about a week. 'Ear surgery can offer patients a real emotional boost in addition to its cosmetic benefits,' concludes Dr Shahidi. **acsm**



Diagram of incisions made during otoplasty procedure



BEFORE



AFTER otoplasty by Dr Shahidi



BEFORE



AFTER otoplasty by Dr Shahidi



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