

"How do I keep my child's audio processor(s) on?"

When children receive cochlear implants (CI), it is important that they wear their devices regularly throughout their waking hours. Research tells us that wearing time is linked to communication outcomes.^{1,2} Here you will find tips on how to encourage your child to wear their audio processor(s) and how to keep them on.

Babies and Small Children

1. Desensitization

- Some children are sensitive to any form of contact with their head or hair. This can lead to an unwillingness to wear their audio processor(s). The desensitization method can be used in these cases.
- The aim of desensitization is that the cochlear implant becomes normalized such as wearing shoes every day.
- Keep the audio processor(s) nearby during the day so it becomes part of the child's everyday life in order to help them to feel comfortable about it.
- Introduce them to the device. You can also 'take it for a ride' on a toy car or train. You can use a teddy, a doll or Mellie with processors on.
- Try putting the audio processor(s) on the child while it's switched off. In case your child uses a soft band to hold the device, try using the band without the device. Once your child accepts the headband, you can introduce and gradually get them used to the device.
- Remember, desensitization takes time and effort. Don't give up!

2. Ensure that the audio processor(s) are comfortable and secure

- If you notice your child taking off the audio processor(s) during loud noises or blinking frequently while hearing sounds around them, contact their audiologist as soon as possible.
- For children who are very active, speak with your audiologist about available audio processor retention options (e.g., head bands, hair clips, etc.). This will help to secure the audio processor(s) in place.
- Custom knit and sports fabric hats are also an option to protect the processor(s) from frequent hand contact.

3. Increase your child's audio processor(s) wear time gradually

- If your child repeatedly pulls off the processor(s), take a break before trying again later when you both feel more relaxed. Gradually increase the wearing time to full-time use as soon as possible.
- Don't forget to make the experience positive.

4. Make it part of their daily routine

- Integrate the audio processor(s) into your child's daily dressing and undressing routine. Continue to encourage your child to wear the audio processor(s) as soon they wake up and remove them just before they go to bed. Remember, there is much opportunity for language during these routines.

5. Use distraction techniques

- Try to make a cochlear implant toy box. This toy box is given to the child only while putting their audio processor(s) on. Using this distraction technique keeps children busy during this process. Exciting and motivating toys are the best choice (e.g., if your child is fond of play dough or a particular book, you may want to include that in the toy box). Try to limit the exposure to these toys throughout the day. You can try to rotate the toys inside the box to keep the excitement going.

6. Get your child excited about their audio processor(s)

- Decorating the audio processor(s) can be exiting for kids. If your child wants their audio processor(s) colorful, contact your audiologist to find out about covers and accessories.
- There are stickers, charms, and decorative clips which are available on the market to decorate audio processor(s).
- When decorating, make sure not to cover anything that must remain uncovered, such as the microphones. Before you start decorating, consult your audiologist.

7. Attend regular audiology appointments

- Attend all audiological appointments to ensure your child's audio processor(s) are programmed correctly. Optimally tuned processors provide appropriate sound experience thus positive wearing experience.

8. Never give up

- Keep your child's processor(s) on a little bit longer than the day before.
- Document every success of prolonging the wear time, it doesn't matter how small.

9. Reach out to other parents

- Other parents might have experienced similar challenges. They may have other tips and tricks that could help you, too. Ask our HearPeers*.

Older Children and Teenagers

When children reach adolescence, the way they view the acceptance of their peers may have a strong influence on them. It is typical to want to be like others and fit in. The reason they might not accept their audio processor(s) is that they want to belong. Here are some tips that can help address these issues.

1. Finding the reason for non-acceptance of their CI(s)

- Find out how your child feels about hearing loss and hearing technology. Give them opportunities to express how they feel about their CI. Children who reject their audio processor(s) may do so for various reasons. They may have difficulty in challenging listening situations, they may be teased or bullied, or they may feel different. It is crucial to address the reason for non-acceptance.

2. Addressing self-esteem and issues of fitting in

- Self-esteem and confidence play a big role in older children and teenagers' life. Children with strong positive self-esteem are more resilient and less at risk for questioning their cochlear implants. This can be addressed by teaching children about their hearing loss, how to talk about their hearing loss, how to be more confident and resilient.

3. Explain the importance

With these children, it is useful to help them understand the benefits of wearing audio processor(s) all their waking hours. Explain how their CI can:

- Enhance relationships and quality of life
- Provide educational benefits
- Offer best listening and learning opportunities
- Help in better speech understanding, sound clarity, and communication skills

4. Reach out to other CI users

- Children at this age will benefit greatly from being connected to peers who also have CIs. Contact with older role models is important as they have experience and knowledge about living with a CI, and this can be helpful for these children. Refer to HearPeers*.

5. Maintain a positive attitude

- It is vital for you to express acceptance and a positive attitude towards your child's hearing loss and use of CIs.

- Use positive language when answering your child's questions.
- Teach your child self-advocacy and compensatory strategies for dealing with difficult situations. Educate them about addressing their needs and teach them how to communicate these to others.

*HearPeers is an online community of volunteer mentors who live with hearing loss. HearPeers Mentors are happy to share their experiences of life with a CI and answer your questions.

It is a place where you can also connect with other people with hearing loss, share experiences, and learn more about hearing loss and hearing solutions.



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References

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