

Questionnaire

Q: At what age did you undergo cochlear implant surgery?

A: My first surgery was at 18 months old followed by a second surgery around 5 years old and then a reimplantation surgery soon after.

Q: Were you made aware of the steps involved in the procedure beforehand?

A: Given that I was only 18 months old, my parents were made aware of the steps involved in the surgical procedure, and this combined with the research they did ensured they felt that cochlear implant surgery was the right decision for me.

Q: Did you feel any discomfort after the surgery? If yes, what discomfort did you experience and for how long?

A: I cannot remember as I was only 18 months old but based on my parents' recollection and my younger brother's experience with cochlear implant surgery, I experienced the expected level of pain or discomfort following any surgery of this type, however, the recovery process for me was smooth.

Q: Was the reason for cochlear implant surgery congenital?

A: Yes – I have congenital hearing loss and I am profoundly deaf in both ears.

Q: Has your cochlear implant ever affected you socially? If yes, could you briefly explain how?

A: As with anything that makes someone stand out in society, I face a considerable amount of discrimination, but I feel this is something that comes with being deaf, not necessarily because I wear cochlear implants. The main social impact of cochlear implants would be strangers staring at me as they would be curious as to what is behind my ears / on my head. Occasionally the technical aspects of my cochlear implants can fail me (e.g. batteries running out or cable breaking) which can cause me to lose hearing on one side (or both in an extreme case) but this is easily managed by carrying spare batteries and having spare equipment at home.

Q: Would you be able to briefly describe one strength and one weakness of your experience with your cochlear implant?

A: Strength: having cochlear implants has given me so many opportunities in life as they have allowed me to be part of the hearing world, and converse easily with my hearing peers through speech.

Weakness: my cochlear implants are not waterproof so I do have to be careful in the rain and I cannot shower or swim with them on. Furthermore, as with any piece of technology, they may not last forever, so there is a chance that I may need reimplantation surgery if they fail in the future.

Q: Do you feel comfortable speaking without your external implant (processor and transmitter) or through sign language?

A: To an extent, yes – when I am at home or around people I am close with that are aware of my disability, I am able to converse easily through lip-reading. When I am not wearing my processors, my voice is slightly different as I cannot hear myself speaking so I have what is commonly known as a “deaf voice” – however, I am comfortable speaking around those that are close to me. I do not know sign language. I am confident in my lip-reading skills and if I had to, I would be able to converse with people outside this comfort zone, but it would be difficult in public situations with lots of people speaking at once, and this would become dangerous if I was near roads with cars or somewhere unfamiliar.

Q: What would you suggest could be improved in society to accommodate those with impaired hearing?

More awareness – while people are becoming more disability-aware and deaf-aware in particular, there is still a lot of ignorance surrounding deafness and how cochlear implants work. One main issue that I have been dealing with at university is that there is not enough support in place for me. For example, online lectures are long recorded videos with no subtitles or transcript, and often my sessions will be back-to-back and as a deaf cochlear implant user, long periods of listening is a greater cognitive drain on me compared to my hearing peers. To make changes I have to seek external support or speak to the Year Leads, and it is shocking that in this day and age education systems are failing to make their content accessible to all their students.

There is also a divide in society between deaf communities – those that choose the cochlear implant route and those that choose not to have medical intervention and communicate using sign language only. I feel as a society we need to be less judgmental and respect others’ decisions on how they wish to communicate and live their lives.