

# The debate on cochlear implants

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What if a child, deaf from birth and with seemingly no hope of repairing the damage, could suddenly hear her mother's voice? Cochlear implants may be controversial among the deaf community, and they are ultimately a decision a family must make for themselves, but the benefits they provide can potentially outweigh some of the risks and controversies. When the hair cells of the cochlea are damaged or destroyed, they cannot regenerate, but cochlear implants can restore hearing.

A tiny microphone picks up soundwaves, and a processor and transmitter convert the sound into electric impulses which stimulate the auditory nerve. The auditory nerve sends the impulses to the brain and there they are interpreted as sound. Because it is a surgical procedure, there are obviously risks, and because a person's language learning areas are more adaptable when they are younger, the implants work best on children who cannot make the decision for themselves. However, despite some of these concerns as well as the controversies among certain members of the deaf community, cochlear implants have the potential to provide a better sense of safety and a new world of hearing for those who would not otherwise have the chance. Most of the concerns about cochlear implants come from many deaf people, and one of their main worries is that the hearing community sees them as needing to be "fixed" with the implants. People in the deaf community do not always think they have a disability, and that it is something that makes them different and unique.

They find a common bond and culture within the community, and point out that many deaf people live happily using only sign language and lip reading (Cochlear Implants for Children – Arguments for and Against). With a culture

that thrives on nonverbal language mostly, implants would change the way everything works. They also bring up the argument that there are risks of certain things like bacterial meningitis and other surgical threats, as well as the concern that because the implants are permanent, they cannot be removed if the person no longer wishes to use them (Cochlear Implants for Children - Arguments for and Against). These risks make it difficult for some families to be on board with cochlear implants, especially when, as they work best the younger the person is, most recipients do not have the chance to make the decision themselves. Between a feeling of a unique culture being threatened and the viable risks of the implants, some people do not think that the cochlear implants should be used, but there are also benefits that are sometimes overlooked.

Cochlear implants, can, in theory, provide safety and security for people who may not otherwise be able to hear telltale warnings a hearing person would automatically recognize. Sounds such as sirens, alarms, even the honk of a car horn, can easily go unnoticed by someone without the sense of hearing. This allows for a greater increase in the danger level of just leaving the house, and a cochlear implant can help a deaf person avoid those dangers more than they would normally be able to. As an example, hypothetically if a person with complete hearing loss was driving and an ambulance approached in their blind spot with the siren running, the driver might not be able to hear the sound and know to move over. This could risk an accident or the slowing of the ambulance to its destination, with possibly fatal consequences. If the person had been able to hear, even with a minimal amount of stimulation, their safety and the safety of others would be greater.

Cochlear implants can provide better safety for those who might be at risk, and along with this security comes something even more beautiful: pure sound. While the deaf community feels that there are strong ties among others who cannot hear, the ability to hear could allow for interaction with others they may not have ordinarily been able to communicate with and enjoy the company of. This assimilation is something that they would not have without some sort of hearing aid or cochlear implant, and with it they get the chance at being part of a community that is larger than they would otherwise be involved in. Along with this also comes the chance to enroll children in public school without the need for a translator. That opens a range of possibilities for education during grade school and also at college, where classes are harder and it is more difficult to focus on sign language and the topic that they are trying to learn. Besides the practical reasons, there is also something beautiful about simply being able to hear sounds that would otherwise go unheard by someone without implants.

For a mother seeing her child react to the sound of her voice for the first time, something like that would be almost a miracle. Cochlear implants are often debated between the deaf and hearing communities, but they do have many benefits that are sometimes overlooked amidst the controversies. The increased safety provided by a sense of hearing, the greater chance for assimilation into the hearing community, and the chance to make friends and relations that would not normally be available, are great things that implants can provide for a deaf person. Of course, a family must make the personal decision of whether or not a child or themselves should be fitted

with cochlear implants, but people considering them should not be so quick to dismiss the chance to have the opportunities hearing can deliver. ?