

COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

A Parent's Guide

Understanding the journey — from first questions to a world of sound

Advantages · Process · Cost · Government Help · Support

Samaanya Foundation

Empowering Caregivers · Enabling Lives · sanyafoundation.com

A note for every parent

To Every Parent Reading This

Hearing your child's name for the first time, the sound of laughter, of music, of rain — these are things most of us take for granted. If your child has been diagnosed with severe hearing loss, you may be searching for answers and feeling overwhelmed.

This guide is written for you — in plain, honest language. No medical jargon. No false promises. Just the real information you need to ask the right questions and take the next step for your child.

You are not alone. And help is closer than you think.

Important: This guide is for information only. Please make all medical decisions with a qualified audiologist, ENT surgeon, and speech-language pathologist.

Quick check

Could My Child Need a Cochlear Implant?

Tick every statement that applies to your child. Bring this completed page to your next doctor visit.

Tick	Does your child...
	Did not respond to sound at birth or in the first weeks of life
	Has been diagnosed with severe or profound hearing loss in one or both ears
	Has been wearing hearing aids for 3–6 months with little improvement in understanding speech
	Does not turn toward sounds or respond when their name is called
	Has delayed speech, has not started speaking at all, or lost speech after an illness
	Is under 5 years old — the earlier the evaluation, the better the outcomes
	A specialist has already mentioned cochlear implant as a possible next step

If you ticked 3 or more: Please consult a cochlear implant centre as soon as possible. Time matters. Contact Samaanya Foundation — sanyafoundation.com — for guidance on where to go.

Understanding the device

What Is a Cochlear Implant?

A cochlear implant (CI) is a small electronic device that **bypasses the damaged part of the ear** and sends sound signals directly to the auditory nerve. The brain then learns to interpret these signals as sound.

It is very different from a hearing aid. A hearing aid makes sounds louder and it still depends on the ear's hair cells to work. A cochlear implant works even when those cells are completely damaged.

Hearing Aid vs Cochlear Implant

Hearing Aid	Cochlear Implant
Makes sounds louder	Completely replaces the cochlea's damaged function
No surgery needed — worn in or behind the ear	Requires surgery to place the device inside the ear
Only helps if some hair cells still function	Works even when hair cells are completely destroyed
Can be used immediately after fitting	The brain must learn to hear. It takes time and therapy

The Four Parts of a Cochlear Implant

Part	Where It Sits	What It Does
External Processor	Worn behind the ear (like a hearing aid shell)	Captures sound and converts it to a digital signal
Transmitter Coil	Held magnetically on the scalp above the ear	Passes the signal through the skin; no wires needed
Internal Receiver / Stimulator	Placed surgically under the scalp — invisible from outside	Receives the signal and sends electrical pulses to the electrode
Electrode Array	Threaded carefully inside the cochlea (the spiral inner ear)	Stimulates the auditory nerve directly, bypassing damaged hair cells

Sound goes in. Science converts it. The brain learns to hear.

Honest information

Benefits and What to Know

We will be completely honest with you: the life-changing benefits and the real challenges. A cochlear implant is not a cure for deafness. It is a powerful tool that works best with commitment, therapy, and love.

Benefits	Be Aware
✓ Children develop spoken language and clear speech — often near age-appropriate levels with consistent therapy	⚠ Surgery under general anaesthesia has standard risks — infection, bleeding. Complications are rare at experienced centres
✓ Can attend regular schools alongside hearing classmates and participate fully in classroom learning	⚠ Remaining natural hearing in the implanted ear is usually permanently lost after surgery
✓ Can hear their parents' voice, music, laughter, and the everyday sounds of life	⚠ Sound quality is different from natural hearing — music in particular may be challenging
✓ Better social confidence and friendships — children feel less isolated from peers	⚠ Not immediate — months to years of daily therapy at home and with a therapist are required for real outcomes
✓ Can hear safety sounds — vehicles, alarms, their name — improving independence and safety	⚠ The external processor must be worn, charged, and maintained every day for life
✓ The internal device lasts a lifetime. Only the external processor needs upgrading every 5–10 years	⚠ Long-term recurring costs: batteries, accessories, processor upgrade every 5–10 years
✓ Government schemes in India can make surgery FREE or heavily subsidised for eligible families	⚠ Results vary — outcomes depend on age at implantation, cause of deafness, and therapy commitment

The most important thing: Children implanted before 18 months of age almost always develop better speech than those implanted later. Every month of delay has a real, lasting cost on language development.

What to expect

The Journey — Step by Step

Here is exactly what the cochlear implant journey looks like — from the very first test to your child speaking and attending school.

Step 01

Hearing Test and Diagnosis

Your child's hearing is tested using BERA / ABR / ASSR — a painless test that can be done while an infant sleeps. The audiologist tells you the degree and type of hearing loss. This is where the journey begins.

Step 02

Hearing Aid Trial (3–6 Months)

Most children are first fitted with hearing aids and given a fair trial period. This is required before cochlear implant candidacy is assessed. The team monitors whether the child is making progress with hearing aids alone.

Step 03

Cochlear Implant Evaluation

If hearing aids show insufficient benefit, a team — ENT surgeon, audiologist, speech therapist, psychologist — formally evaluates your child. A CT scan or MRI checks whether the cochlea and auditory nerve are healthy enough for surgery.

Step 04

Counselling and Decision

The team explains everything — realistic expectations, the commitment rehabilitation requires, cost, financial options, and alternatives. This is the right time to ask every question you have. No pressure to decide immediately.

Step 05

Surgery (2–3 Hours)

The surgery is performed under general anaesthesia. The surgeon places the internal receiver behind the ear under the scalp and threads the electrode array carefully into the cochlea. Hospital stay is typically 1–2 days.

Step 06

Healing (3–6 Weeks)

The wound heals over several weeks. The device is not yet switched on. Your child attends follow-up visits for the surgeon to check recovery. Normal activities resume gradually.

Step 07

Switch-On — Activation Day

The audiologist activates the external processor and maps it for your child's hearing. For the first time, your child's brain receives sound signals. Children react in many ways — confusion, crying, delight. It is an unforgettable moment.

Step 08

Ongoing Mapping Sessions

The audiologist fine-tunes the map over many sessions — especially in the first 12–18 months — as the brain develops and the child's hearing improves. This is a normal, ongoing part of the process.

Step 09

Auditory-Verbal Therapy — The Most Important Part

A trained therapist works with your child and teaches you how to practise daily at home. Listening, sound recognition, speech, and language develop through this sustained effort. This phase typically runs for 2–5 years.

Step 10

School, Life, and Long-term Follow-Up

With consistent therapy, most children attend regular schools, form friendships, and live full lives. Annual audiological reviews and processor upgrades continue for life. The internal implant never needs to be replaced.

After activation

How Your Child Will Progress

After the implant is switched on, the brain begins learning to hear. Here is a typical progress timeline when therapy is consistent:

Timeframe	What Typically Happens
Day 1 — Switch-On	Child may react with surprise, confusion, or crying. This is completely normal — the brain has never received signals like these before.
Months 1–3	Detects sounds. Startles at loud noises. Begins to recognise parents' voices. The brain is actively adjusting.
Months 3–6	Discriminates between voices and environmental sounds. Begins turn-taking — listening then responding.
Months 6–12	Identifies common sounds. Understands simple words — 'no', 'bye', their own name. Starts imitating sounds.
Year 1–2	First clear words appear. Vocabulary expands rapidly. Two-word phrases: 'mama paani', 'aur do'. Meaningful conversations with family.
Years 2–5	Language grows toward age-appropriate levels. Ready for mainstream school. Can follow a classroom without difficulty.
School Age Onward	Regular schooling, friendships, sports, and full participation in society. Annual reviews, processor upgrades every 5–10 years.

Remember: A child implanted at 12 months will almost always speak better than one implanted at 4 years. The brain's hearing pathways develop most rapidly in early childhood. Act early.

Understanding cost

How Much Does It Cost — And How to Get Help

Cost is often the first concern for families. Here is an honest breakdown of what to expect — and the substantial help that is available in India that many families do not know about.

What You Pay For	Approx. Cost	Notes
Cochlear Implant Device	**Rs 6–21 lakh(for one ear)** **Rs 11–38 lakh(for both ear)**	Varies by brand — Cochlear, MED-EL, Advanced Bionics, Oticon. Price varies between models and generations.
Surgery — hospital and surgeon fees	**Rs 1–3 lakh**	Private hospital fees vary significantly by city and centre. Government hospitals cost far less.
Pre-operative evaluations (CT / MRI / tests)	**Rs 30,000–80,000**	Imaging and specialist consultations needed before surgery is approved.
Auditory-Verbal Therapy — first 2 years	**Rs 60,000–2 lakh**	Varies significantly. Some NGOs and government institutions offer subsidised or free therapy.
Processor upgrade (every 5–10 years)	**Rs 2–5 lakh**	Only the external processor is upgraded. The internal device lasts a lifetime.
Batteries and accessories — per year	**Rs 15,000–40,000**	Rechargeable processor models reduce this significantly.
TOTAL — First 2 years, one ear	**Rs 8–18 lakh**	Wide range depending on hospital, device brand, and therapy access.

Many families in India get this surgery free or nearly free. Know your options before assuming you cannot afford it.

Financial Help Available Right Now in India

ADIP Scheme — Government of India

The Assistance to Disabled Persons scheme funds cochlear implants for families below the income threshold. Apply through your district disability office or AYJNISHD, Mumbai.

RBSK — Free Surgery for Children

Under the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (NHM), children up to 18 years can receive FREE cochlear implant surgery at select government hospitals across India.

AIIMS and Government Hospitals

State Government Schemes

AIIMS Delhi, AIIMS Mumbai, JIPMER Puducherry, NIMHANS Bengaluru, and many state medical colleges offer surgery at a fraction of private hospital cost.	Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and many states run their own cochlear implant support programmes. Ask your district health office for details.

Corporate CSR Funding Many Indian companies fund cochlear implant surgeries through their CSR obligations. NGOs like Samaanya Foundation can connect your family with these opportunities at no cost.	**Health Insurance** Some insurance policies now cover cochlear implants. Check your policy specifically and advocate with your insurer if CI is not listed — many add it on request.

Please contact us before deciding it is unaffordable. Samaanya Foundation aim to help families receive the surgery for as little as zero rupees out of pocket through government schemes. Reach us at samaanyafoundation.com

Be prepared

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Take this page to your appointment. Every question below is important. A good cochlear implant team will welcome all of them.

About Surgery and the Device

Question to Ask	Why It Matters
Is my child a good candidate — and why specifically?	You need to understand the reason, not just a yes or no answer.
What outcomes can we realistically expect for our child?	Every child's profile is different. Generic promises should not satisfy you.
Which device do you recommend, and why?	There are multiple brands. Understand the specific reasoning behind the recommendation.
How many CI surgeries has your team performed? What is your complication rate?	Experience at the centre directly affects outcomes and safety.
Will any remaining natural hearing be preserved after surgery?	This decision is irreversible, you must know before committing.

About Cost and Financial Help

Question to Ask	Why It Matters
What is the complete cost breakdown — device, surgery, mapping, therapy?	There should be no hidden costs that appear after you commit.
Which government schemes or subsidies are we eligible for?	Most families do not ask this and miss significant help they are entitled to.
How many post-operative mapping sessions are included?	Some hospitals charge separately for each mapping visit. Know in advance.
What are the realistic ongoing annual costs after the first two years?	Plan for the long term from the beginning, not just the surgery itself.

About Therapy and Schooling

Question to Ask	Why It Matters
Is there an auditory-verbal therapist at your centre or do you refer out?	Continuity between the CI team and therapist significantly improves outcomes.
How many therapy sessions per week will my child need?	Plan your family schedule and therapy budget from the start.

What should we be doing at home every day?	Home practice is where most of the real progress actually happens.
When would my child be ready for a regular mainstream school?	Set realistic educational expectations and start planning school placement early.

Parents ask

Honest Answers to Common Questions

Q Will my child hear exactly like a normal child after the implant?

Not exactly. Cochlear implant sound is electrical — it is different from natural hearing. However, most children who receive an implant early and receive consistent therapy develop clear spoken language, can have conversations, attend regular school, and function fully in society. Many of their classmates would not even know they have a hearing device. The journey takes time, but the results can be extraordinary.

Q Can we wait until our child is older and let them decide themselves?

This is your choice and we respect it. But waiting has a significant, well-documented cost. The brain's hearing pathways are most adaptable in the first three years of life. A child implanted at 12 months will almost always develop better speech than one implanted at 4 or 5. After age 7, outcomes become significantly harder to achieve. If your child is young, time is the one resource you cannot get back.

Q Is the surgery risky or painful?

The surgery is performed under general anaesthesia so your child will not feel anything. Risks are similar to any general procedure — infection, bleeding — and are uncommon at experienced centres. The facial nerve runs near the surgical site, and damage is a very rare but documented risk. Most children recover within a few days and return to normal activities within 2–3 weeks.

Q We cannot afford Rs 10 lakh. What should we do?

Please do not let assumed cost stop you from exploring this. Many families in India receive the surgery for free or at very low cost through RBSK, ADIP, or state-level schemes, or at government hospitals like AIIMS and JIPMER. Samaanya Foundation specifically helps families find and apply for these schemes. Contact us at sanyafoundation.com before concluding it is unaffordable.

Q Can my child swim, play sports, and go to school normally?

Yes, completely. Children with cochlear implants live normal, active lives. The internal device is sealed inside the body. The external processor should be removed for swimming unless it is a waterproof model. For contact sports, a protective cover or helmet may be advised. School, sports, friendships, travel: all of it is possible and happens every day.

Q Should we teach sign language at the same time?

This is entirely your family's decision. Some families focus exclusively on spoken language through Auditory-Verbal Therapy. Others combine speech with sign language. Both approaches are valid. Your therapist and CI team will help you decide based on your child's profile and your family's goals.

Q What if the device stops working one day?

Device failure is uncommon but possible. The internal device is typically covered by a manufacturer warranty. Revision surgery to replace a failed internal device is possible. The external processor, more likely to develop issues over time, can be repaired or replaced, and is upgraded every 5–10 years as technology improves. You will not be left without support.

For the clinic or hospital

Your Child's Information

This page is for the clinic, hospital, or audiologist distributing this guide. Please fill in your contact details before handing it to the family. You may also type and print your details directly on this page.

Clinic / Hospital Name	
Doctor / Audiologist Name	
Contact Number	
Website or Email	
Recommended CI Centre	
Date of This Visit	
Next Appointment	
Notes for Family	

We Are Here for You

Samaanya Foundation is a registered non-profit dedicated to supporting families of children with disabilities across India. We are not a hospital. We are not paid by any device company. We are simply here to help you navigate this journey.

We can help you:

- Find an accredited cochlear implant centre nearest to you
- Understand and apply for government schemes like ADIP and RBSK
- Connect with other families who have already completed this journey
- Navigate hospital paperwork, referrals, and follow-up processes
- Find good therapists and school support resources in your area

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Samaanya Foundation does not charge families for guidance or scheme navigation.

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