

## ASK THE DOC

### PINS AND NEEDLES

QUERY FROM MDM GOH  
I'm 97. I am in relatively good health for my age, although I have mild high blood pressure. For the past two years, I've been feeling a prickly, pins-and-needles sensation in my fingers. It is most apparent when I wash my hands. I can still use my hands normally but the sensation causes much discomfort. And when I extend my fingers and open my palms, my hands feel extremely "tight". Many doctors have told me this is just due to old age but is there anything that can be done to relieve the discomfort? Or prevent the sensation from occurring?



REPLY BY DR RESHMA A MERCHANT,  
HEAD OF GENERAL MEDICINE AND GERIATRICIAN, UNIVERSITY MEDICINE CLUSTER,  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

You are doing very well for your age. Prickly, pins-and-needles sensation in medical terms means paraesthesia. The feeling in your hands is conveyed to your brain by neurons (nerve cells).

Paraesthesia is caused by disturbances in the conduction or transfer of this information to the brain. Direct pressure at the wrist joints on the nerves supplying your hands can also cause paraesthesia, such as a condition called carpal tunnel syndrome. This occurs when the nerve is compressed as it passes through a narrow channel in the wrist. Repetitive motion can cause the lining of the channel to swell and press on the nerve.

There are other causes of paraesthesia, which is common in older adults, that need to be excluded. They include hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid), cervical spondylitis and Vitamin B12 deficiency.

If the symptoms persist, it is important that you see a specialist for a thorough examination and relevant blood tests. You should also let your specialist know if you are taking any medications.

Age should not be a barrier. These days, adults as old as 105 years old are undergoing hip surgery and walking.

The information provided above is for your general knowledge only. You should seek medical advice or treatment for your condition. Email questions to [health@newstoday.com.sg](mailto:health@newstoday.com.sg).

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Date: 13 January 2010 (Wed)  
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## COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

# Music to the ears of worried parents

'Bionic ears' offer deaf or hearing-impaired kids the gift of hearing

EVELINE GAN  
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ABOUT eight months after he was born, baby Markus C finally heard his parents' voices clearly for the first time.

Markus, who was born with profound hearing loss in both ears, is one of the youngest children in Singapore to have received cochlear implants.

Also known as a bionic ear, a cochlear implant is an electronic device designed to help people who are deaf or have severe hearing loss.

While hearing aids amplify sound, a cochlear implant bypasses the damaged part of the ear and directly stimulates the auditory nerve to help the person "hear" sounds.

Associate Professor Lynne Lim, senior consultant and director of the Centre for Hearing Intervention and Language Development at the National University Hospital (NUH), performed the cochlear implants surgery on Markus last September when he was seven months old.

### BIONIC EARS

Now, Markus has cochlear implants in either side of his skull. He wears an external sound processor, which is about the size of a 50-cent coin, behind both ears.



AFP

The external processor captures sound and converts it into digital signals to the internal implants. The internal implants then directly stimulate the auditory nerve, which delivers the signal to the brain, allowing sound to be "heard".

A month after Markus' surgery, an audiologist turned on the device, helping Markus enter the world of sound and speech.

Describing his son's reaction when the cochlear implants were activated for the first time, Markus' father, 38-year-old Peter C, said: "He smiled and turned around to

be treated by hearing aids, are suitable for cochlear implantation.

Assoc Prof Lim explained that, while hearing aids may be useful for those with mild to moderate hearing problems, they will not help in cases of severe profound hearing loss.

For hearing-impaired babies, not being able to hear can lead to long-term problems. Said Assoc Prof Lim: "Children require near perfect hearing for speech, language acquisition and learning, which is especially crucial in the first four years of their lives."

Assoc Prof Tan added: "If you cannot hear, you cannot learn, so a child with complete hearing loss will be deaf and dumb. If the child has partial hearing loss, he or she will also have poor speech development."

For Mr and Mrs Peter C, such worries spurred them to consider the implants. They eventually paid a five-figure sum for their son's cochlear implants.

"It is very expensive but it is a small cost compared to what we can give our child. As parents, you want your child to be as normal as possible. We hope for Markus to grow up, having the same opportunities as his older brother," said Mrs C, 40, a homemaker. Markus' older brother is three-and-a-half years old and does not have any hearing problems.

### IS IMPLANTING A CHILD EARLY ALWAYS BETTER?

According to Assoc Prof Lim, research has

shown that implanting the child at an earlier age helps improve speech and language acquisition outcomes.

"I have implanted children who were below or at one year old delight us with age-appropriate language skills by two years old. Some families work so hard with their kids they are even ahead of their peers by three. That said, a lot of credit must go to the families, audiologists, therapists and school teachers who work very hard with the kids," she said.

On the other hand, Assoc Prof Tan said implanting a very young child has its risks. The youngest child to receive cochlear implants at KKH is 11 months.

"As a standard, as long as the child is implanted by or before two years, the child will do very well. The risk of implanting a very young child is that you may implant a child who actually has hearing or remnant hearing," he explained.

Parents must also be aware of the long-term follow-up care needed after the surgery.

Just three months after his cochlear implants were activated, and after countless sessions of therapy, Mrs C said Markus — now almost 11 months old — can hear almost as well as "any normal hearing child". He is also at the same level of speech development as babies in his age group.

"Looking at it positively, we were lucky that we found out (about his hearing problem) early and did something about it," said Mrs C.

## HEALTH LISTINGS

### HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIR 2010

Tan Tock Seng Hospital is holding a two-day health fair comprising basic health checks, eye screening, traditional medicine consultation, basic fitness assessment, pre-lasik assessment, and diabetic foot screening or biomechanical foot assessments. First-come-first-served.  
Date: Thursday and Friday  
Time: 10am to 4pm  
Venue: TTSH Atrium, Level 1 (Opposite Kopitiam), Tan Tock Seng Hospital  
Fee/registration: For information on talks and health screenings, call 6357 8188 or email [yourhealth@ttsh.com.sg](mailto:yourhealth@ttsh.com.sg).

### PRACTICAL HOME SAFETY TIPS FOR THE ELDERLY

Falls are the leading cause of accidents among Singaporeans above 65. For the elderly, a fall can be fatal. An occupational therapist will share tips on how to

make your home safer for the aged.

Date: Friday  
Time: 1pm to 2pm  
Venue: Health Education Hub, Main Building 1, Level 1, NUH Hospital  
Fee/registration: Free. To register, call 6772 2184.

### RIDING THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER-COASTER OF CANCER

Cancer can be an emotional turmoil for both the patient and family. Pick up practical tips to help cancer patients, their caregivers and children cope with the emotional distress. A cancer survivor will also share her experience.

Date: Saturday  
Time: 9.30am to 12.30pm  
Venue: KKH Auditorium, (Training Centre), Level 1, Women's Tower, KK Women's and Children's Hospital  
Fee/registration: Free. To register, call 6394 2205.

## TV HIGHLIGHTS. 40

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**What are the advantages of LASIK surgery over other laser eye surgery procedures?**  
LASIK is safe and accurate. The experience is relatively painless and it has a fast visual recovery time of about six hours.

**What results can I expect from a LASIK surgery procedure?**  
There is a high chance, approximately 99 per cent, that you do not need to wear spectacles or contact lenses after the surgery. Do note that there is a one per cent chance that your vision may be under or over-corrected but this can be further enhanced.

**Are the results achieved from LASIK permanent?**  
Yes, for a vast majority of patients, their vision remains in focus permanently.

**Is it true that people who have had LASIK surgery will suffer from complications when they undergo treatment for cataracts in their later years?**

No. The only "complication" that may arise is when the patient cannot produce his original, pre-LASIK eye data which is needed for the prescription of new lenses to replace the patient's clouded lenses.

This is why at Parkway Eye Centre, we always give our patients their eye data for safekeeping, in case they need it 20 years down the road should they develop cataracts.

The answers are provided by Dr Lee Hung Ming, medical director and senior consultant, Parkway Eye Centre.

Visit [www.parkwayeyecentre.com](http://www.parkwayeyecentre.com) or call 6470 3366 for more information. The Parkway Eye Centre is located at Gleneagles Hospital, Level 3, Hospital Block, 6A Napier Road, Singapore 258500

Series of Seminars by: **JIRO IMAI, Ph.D.** (Pharmaceutical Scientist) Chief Lecturer, International HQ of Happy Science - Tokyo, Japan. Former Research Scientist at National Institute of Health (NIH), USA.

**Change your Thoughts to Overcome Illness**  
Date: SAT 16 Jan 2010  
Time: 2pm - 5pm

**Discover the Power Within to Heal Yourself**  
Date: SUN 17 Jan 2010  
Time: 2pm - 5pm

Fortune Centre, #16-05, 190 Middle Rd (near Bugis MRT station)

FREE seminar  
Welcome Reception: 16 Jan 2010, 10am - 12pm  
Limited capacity - SMS name, contact number, email address & choice of seminar to **9387 2975 / 9183 3673** to register.

Miraculous "true medicine" which can help overcome even terminal cancer will be discussed. Speaker will also disclose ideas for preventing illness and improving health by correcting distortion of the mind, for both the sick and healthy.

Recommended as a sequel to Sat seminar, speaker will discuss the true cause of chronic diseases like diabetes and arthritic rheumatism, and the hidden power of the patient's mind to overcome them. Powerful testimonies of patients who survived these deadly diseases will also be shared.

Happy Science Singapore  
Singapore@happy-science.org