

Protruding ears are no problem

Konstanz: protruding ears are fastened with a new method
by Frank van Bebber, Konstanz

In the Konstanz Clinic, protruding ears are being fastened with a completely new method. Instead of cutting open the ears and treating the bleeding cartilage, the auricle is brought into the proper position with a nylon thread and a maximum of twelve stitches. The patient can go home immediately.

Whenever she looked into a mirror with her mother Ingrid, Selina Häusler (6) saw just one thing: her protruding ears. In family pictures, passport photos, and vacation slides, Selina's protruding ears were noticeable, even if friends and relatives politely kept quiet. Ridicule and jokes <like Prince Charles> accompany most people with protruding ears every day.

20 Minutes .

Ingrid Häusler, from Mühlingen near Konstanz, wanted to spare her daughter this fate - and she was amazed how easy this was. For Privatdozent and attending physician Waldemar Merck fastened Selina's protruding ears in the clinic in just 20 minutes, using only nylon thread.

The ENT doctor from near Lake Constance developed the new method. With thin nylon thread and at most twelve stitches, in 20 minutes he does what colleagues do when they cut open the ear, peel back the skin, and cut or shave off the ear cartilage in a bloody operation. <The advantages of this method, which was first developed in Germany, are evident from the cosmetic result and the fact that the patient can be released on the day of the operation,> says Merck. At two conferences, including one of the German Academy for Cosmetic Surgery and one in Switzerland, he introduced his method. His colleagues' reaction was so good that he is now publicizing his work.

Merck arrived at his method for tackling protruding ears four years ago. At that time, he read about a combined operation: fastening the ear with a thread and cutting open the ear. First Merck thought this didn't make any sense, then he tried the technique - and then finally omitted the cutting-open of the ear, in contrast to the description. The result was persuasive: with a maximum of twelve stitches in the ear, Merck forms a natural-looking new fold in the auricle. The ear lies flat against the head.

No scars

The thread, which runs invisibly under the skin, is knotted in a special way; this is the so-called "mattress stitch." The only "injuries" are the twelve needle-sticks, which heal quickly. "There will be no more cutting with visible scars as in the past," says Merck. Even experts cannot distinguish an ear that has been operated on with the stitch method from an ear that has not been operated on.

Collected experience

In the last four years, Merck has operated on 50 children and five adults. The doctor is now certain: the thread holds forever.

The operation costs approximately 2000 DM per ear. Merck operates on adults under local anesthetic, on children under general anesthesia. The risks are lower than for the customary operation: infection, swelling, and bruises have not yet occurred.

97 percent of all protruding ears can be fastened with the stitch method, says Merck. "I hope I will not be the only one who will use this method."

Little Selina is looking forward to her first day of school in the summer. Four weeks after the operation, her ears look as if they had always lain so close to her head. The six year old no longer has to fear ridicule of her protruding ears.

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