Getting a Cochlear Implant

Written and Photographed by Kathryn Schneider

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I have two ears. They are right here. Ears are for hearing. Ears are for listening.

Sometimes ears don't work well. Everything sounds quiet. Sometimes I don't hear anything. I go to a special ear doctor. She is called an audiologist. She looks in my ears.

At the audiologist's office I play games. It does not hurt. The games are fun. They test my ears.

I have hearing loss. This means I don't hear as well as some kids.
The audiologist can help me hear better.

I get hearing aids. They can help my ears hear. They make sounds a little louder.
I wear them all the time.

Hearing aids don’t always help enough. With my hearing aids, I still can't hear everything. My ears need more help. I might need a cochlear implant.

A cochlear implant has two parts. One part goes inside my head. A special doctor puts it there. This doctor is called a surgeon. The other part goes on my ear. Both parts work together.

To get the inside part of my implant, I go to the hospital.
My family goes with me. I put on hospital pajamas.

The surgeon puts on hospital clothes, too. She wears a mask and hat.
They make sure everything stays clean.

I have my blanket and teddy bear from home. Teddy is a little scared. I am, too. My family kisses me. I get some medicine. It helps me fall asleep.

Soon, it is time to wake up. My family is there. I have a bandage on my head. It covers my ear and the inside part of my implant. I still can't hear. I need to wait until my implant is turned on.

For a few days, I rest in bed. I am a little unsteady. Then, I feel better.
I don't need a bandage anymore. I can run and play.

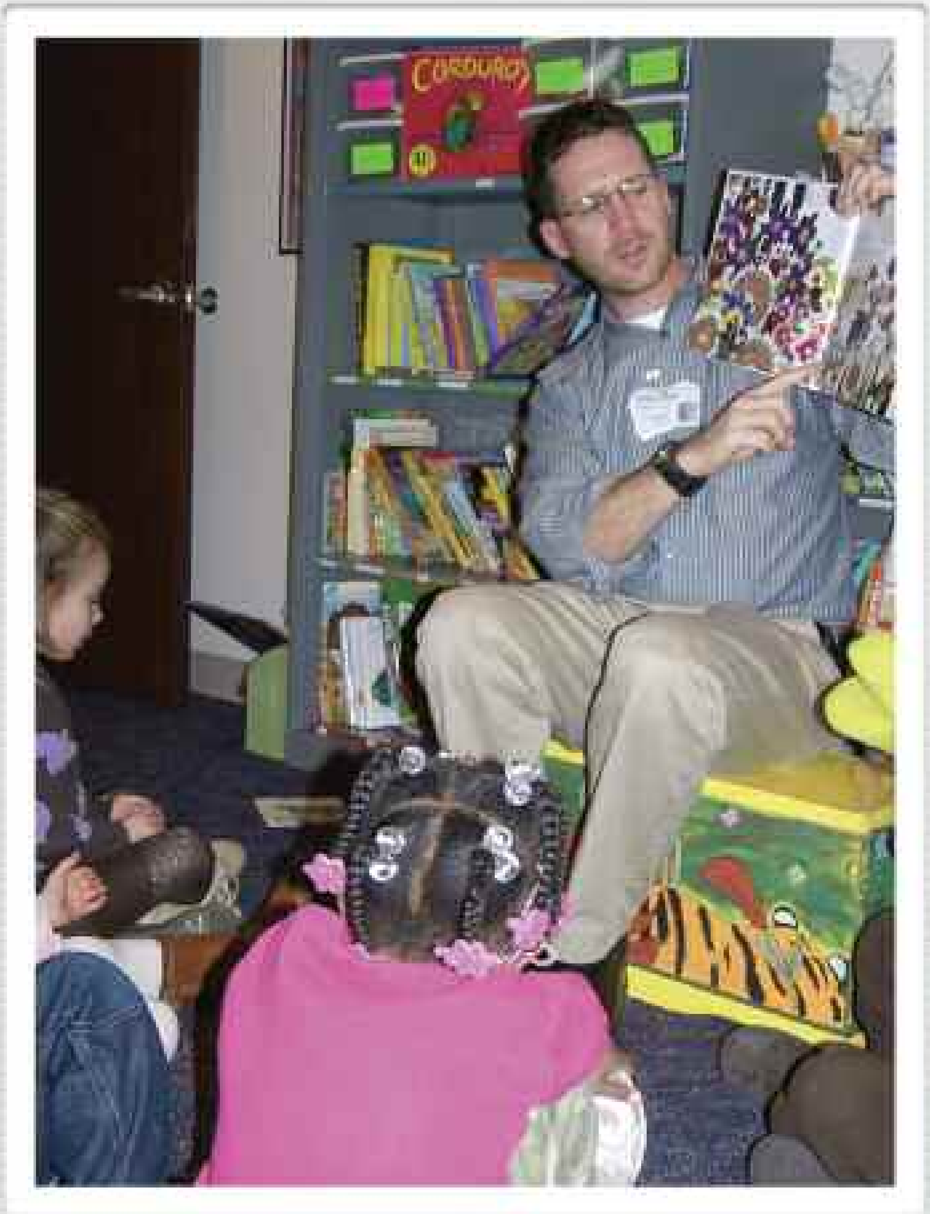
Time to go back to the audiologist. She gives me the part for my ear.
It can be different colors. Sometimes kids get one on each ear.

I practice putting a cochlear implant on my bear. Then, the audiologist turns mine on. The outside part and the inside part work together. I hear sounds! They are loud and a little scary. It is ok if I cry.

The sounds are new. I don't know them. I need to practice listening.

We learn how to take care of my implant. I get help with the batteries.
I don't let my implant get wet. I have to be careful with it.

I wear my cochlear implant every day. I wear it at home. I wear it at school.



I hear lots of sounds. I don't always know what they are. Sometimes I ask for help. Now sounds are starting to make sense. I am learning to hear. I am learning to talk.

I have a speech language therapist. She works with me and my family.
She helps me understand the new sounds. I have to listen and work hard.

As I grow, I go see the audiologist many times. She always makes sure my implant is working. She tests how I hear with it. She can make it louder or quieter if I need her to.

With my cochlear implant I can hear a lot. With practice, I will hear more like you.

Kathryn "Casey" Schneider is an audiology doctoral student at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Her undergraduate degree is in special education with an emphasis in children with hearing loss. After graduation, she plans to work as a pediatric audiologist. Kathryn lives with her husband and their two cats.

www.vanderbiltbillwilkersoncenter.com

The Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center is dedicated to helping individuals with hearing loss and other communication challenges reach their highest potential. Serving patients not only from Nashville, but the entire region and across the nation, the Center assists more than 50,000 people of all ages every year.

Founded in 1951 by a Nashville physician, Dr. Wesley Wilkerson, the Center is nationally and internationally acclaimed for its work in communication disorders. The Bill Wilkerson Center offers extensive diagnostic and therapeutic services for infants, children and adults with problems related to hearing, speech and language. In addition to their clinical programs, the Center houses the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences where audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and educators of the deaf receive graduate education.

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