



# Central West Specialists

Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

## EXOSTOSES

Exostosis is a bony overgrowth that forms in the deep part of the ear canal. They are caused by frequent swimming and are therefore not common in rural areas. Long term cold water swimming irritates the bony lining of the ear canal and causes it to form new bone.

If the bone overgrowth becomes too large, this can block off the hearing and cause recurring infections. Most cases can be treated just with ear plugs but once the blockage becomes too severe, then surgery is indicated.

### THE OPERATION

This operation takes about two and a half hours. Tiny drills are used to remove the overgrown bone.

There are several very important structures in this area. In the front is the jaw joint which must not be entered. This can be avoided without difficulty. Behind is the facial nerve which supplies the muscles to the right side of the face. This is a very important nerve and it can be avoided without too much difficulty.

The exostoses lie right up against the ear drum. There is no room between the exostoses and the drum whatsoever so the exostoses have to be very carefully removed from this area.

Damage to the ear drum or the bones of hearing can cause a significant hearing loss but this problem is very rare. Likewise just behind the ear drum is the nerve for taste. This applies the taste to one side of the tongue. It is very rare for this to be damaged in this type of operation but it can occur.

The greatest risk of the operation is related to slow healing. The skin that remains has to grow over a wider ear canal and this will usually take about six weeks. It is most important that no infection occurs during this time and water must be strictly kept away from the area.

An unusual complication from the surgery is tinnitus or ringing in the ear. This is uncommon and is thought to be due to the loud noise from the drilling. Problems such as this usually diminish with time and in my experience I have never seen a case.

Overall, exostoses is common but most do not require treatment. Those cases for treatment are very carefully selected.

**Dr Peter Bryan F.R.A.C.S.**

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Following the operation as the area heals it is advised that people wear ear plugs anyway if they are keen swimmers because the exostoses will grow back in this situation usually within ten years and then the operation will have to be repeated.

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