

WHY I...

had otoplasty



Penny Wilson is happier to see her reflection in the mirror than she was 20 years ago.

When she was 32, the former model underwent otoplasty, an operation that sets prominent ears closer to the head.

Wilson doesn't recall being taunted for having remarkable ears when she was a child, but she does remember the various hair styles she mastered to camouflage them.

"When we were little, we lived in New Guinea. We had to wear our hair short because of the heat and for cleanliness. My brother and I had coconut cuts. It was like a crew cut. By the time I got to school, I was wearing it in pigtailed over my ears." Wilson also took to plaiting and teasing her hair and, during the 1970s, wore scarves to hide her ears.

A chance meeting with the wife of a plastic surgeon while on holiday in Mexico made Wilson decide to have her ears pinned back.

"They cut the full length of the back of the ear and sewed it back. My head was bandaged for 10 days," she says.

There was discomfort for up to 12 weeks after the surgery, but Wilson says the positives far outweighed the negatives. "It changes your life. For self-esteem - I'd recommend it, especially for children. It's such a simple operation really, with such dramatic results."

After the operation, Wilson says she had her hair cut short geometrically around her ears to show them off. Two decades later, she still doesn't take the change in her looks for granted. "I'm so glad I had that done. I have no regrets."

EXPERT VIEW

Dr Mark Kohout, plastic surgeon:

Kohout skews his work towards adults, but says it is generally more common for people to have otoplasty in childhood.

"Kids have it done because they get teased about their ears," he says.

Kohout says adults have otoplasty because they may feel uncomfortable in social situations, and are just as sensitive about comments concerning their ears as children. Otoplasty can improve confidence in social situations and in relationships, he says.

While risks associated with the operation are minimal, Kohout says ear pinning does not always result in absolute symmetry, but "no one is symmetrical anyway".

By Belinda Cranston