



# DOCTOR'S ORDERS

**R**ivkala was the first girl born to her parents after three boys, and as soon as she was settled in her family's home, her mother turned to her father and stated in no uncertain terms, "This girl needs earrings."

Not one to dilly-dally, Rivkala's mother took the baby to a nearby jeweler who pierced her ears for a reasonable fee. In his haste, however, the jeweler — whose hands may have been slightly unsteady — accidentally pierced one of her ears dangerously close to the edge of the earlobe. Somehow, the earlobe stayed intact, and Rivkala's mother held her breath.

When Rivkala was six years old, she was treated by her grandmother to beautiful little diamond studs. Despite her penchant for losing her earrings, Rivkala kept the studs in her ears for a full year. But one day, as she sat on the front stoop, she noticed that one of her treasured earrings was on the floor. Relieved that she hadn't lost the earring, she ran inside to ask her mother to place it back in her ear. But instead of replacing it, her mother gasped when she saw that the earlobe, the one with the low-set hole, had finally torn through, no longer able to withstand the weight of the earring.

Fearful of anesthesia of any kind, Rivkala's mother never allowed her to repair the tear, and over the ensuing years, the rip closed up somewhat but never completely.

By now, Rivkala is closing in on thirty, and with a houseful of little ones, she has never even considered undergoing a procedure to reclose the earlobe. Instead, she converts all her earrings to clip-backs, usually for a nominal fee of about \$10. As she tells it, "My insurance doesn't cover the cost, and I'm not shelling out big bucks."

According to Dr. Nima Patel, Board Certified Plastic Surgeon, Director of Microsurgery at Maimonides Medical Center, it's common for earlobes to tear from the point of the pierced hole down and straight through the remaining earlobe, especially among toddlers and young girls. It can happen suddenly via trauma, or, in the case of heavy dangling earrings, gradually over months and even years.

The good news is that the procedure to repair a tear is relatively painless and takes no more than about 10 to 15 minutes, usually performed in-office under local anesthesia. In

fact, many of Dr. Patel's patients use their lunch breaks to get it done. The edges of the torn lobe are sutured together, and other than some pesky stitches that need to remain in place for about 10 days, the post-op care is minimal: massaging the surgical site to prevent scar formation, and avoidance of clip-on earrings for at least a month, although preferably for the duration of the healing process. Once the site is fully healed, after about three months, the ears can be re-pierced and the lobe(s) will be as good as new — or nearly so, as scar tissue is never quite as strong as natural tissue.

Dr. Patel warns that once an earlobe suffers a tear, it is more prone to future tears.

The following may help prevent recurrence and can also be implemented to prevent injury in the first place:

- Avoid large, heavy earrings, specifically those that dangle and can catch onto materials such as knits, sweaters, and towels
- Do not wear earrings in bed
- Avoid holding the phone against your ear when wearing earrings
- Avoid wearing earrings during rigorous sports and exercise regimens

Dr. Patel also warns her patients to seek help immediately after the earlobe rips so that it can be repaired while the edges are still raw and can grow together with minimal intervention.

Once a week or so passes, the skin grows back and the procedure becomes slightly more complicated, although still very doable. It is best to visit an experienced plastic surgeon, who will ensure that the edges are well aligned and will heal with minimal scarring.

*A note of caution to those individuals who have a personal or family history of keloid formation (overgrowth of scar tissue):* Be sure to share this information with the surgeon, who will inject the site with steroids to help keep scarring to a minimum. **IB**

Fearful of anesthesia of any kind, Rivkala's mother never allowed her to repair the tear.

---

*Ratzy Szimonowitz's fascination with all things medical led her to become a nurse, and since 1999, she has worked with individuals of all ages who suffer from a variety of medical and psychiatric issues. She is currently on the staff of Ohel Bais Ezra and considers it her "home away from home."*

We welcome your feedback! Have a question or concern about a pediatric health matter? Want to share your child's medical scenario with a specialist? Send us a short synopsis for possible inclusion in this column. [doctorsorders@binahmagazine.com](mailto:doctorsorders@binahmagazine.com)