

## **CIICA CONVERSATION: YOUNG ADULTS: Ready, Set....What? Navigating Sports with CI**

**26 January 2026** **Facilitators:** Qais Khan – CIICA/UK; Lucas Armengol, Spain, Raquel LeBlanc, Canada, Melis Durmaz Yildirim, Turkey.

**Observers:** Sue Archbold, CIICA/UK;

### **Introduction:**

CI users shared their experiences with CI and managing sports for this CONVERSATION for young adults with cochlear implants. There were 36 attendees, including approximately 22 CI users from 10 countries: Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, India, Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, UK, USA. There were several teachers of the deaf, to listen and learn, and one teacher of the deaf was using the conversation with her student in school, two teachers of the deaf had CI. Attendees also included audiologists, psychologists ENT, and

Live captioning was provided, with Spanish and Turkish available.

Melis welcomed everyone and provided housekeeping advice re captioning and introduced Lucas and Raquel, encouraging attendees to introduce themselves in the chat room. This summary is taken from the transcript and the chat room which was very interactive.

### **The challenges navigating sports with CI.**

Lucas introduced this part of the conversation with these challenges from his own experience, inviting comments:

#### **Football**

- Processors fall off easily while running or during contact with other players
- Ball impacts can damage the device
- Rain and moisture increase the risk of malfunction

#### **Skiing**

- Tight helmet: moves the coils when putting it on → you lose sound
- Loose helmet: less protection and higher chance of processors falling off
- Hard to balance safety and implant stability

The group played a lot of sports including swimming, ice hockey, hockey, netball, gymnastics, running, volleyball, rugby, basketball, judo and shared their common challenges:

#### **Processor/coil falling off**

This is a major issue for all the users:

*When I was playing football, the main thing is it's a very physical sport, and also you have to run a lot. It's very easy for the processors to fall off and while you're running or while your opponent makes you fall or perhaps you get hit by the ball, or when you try to hit the Ball with your head it's very easy the cochlear implant to fall off. So, it's very annoying to have to pick the cochlear implants from the floor or maybe they get broken due to the situation.*

Lucas commented that it was a common thing, reading from the chat room: it is often recommended to wear a helmet but this is not straightforward either:

*\*\*\* also struggles with the helmet, and he just usually wears a just one cochlear implant without any issues, and if he wears two it hurts and if he doesn't has not found any helmet that then works with the both cochlear implants. (Teacher of the deaf)*

*I also find it difficult to wear a helmet with a processor while playing sports.*

*and also sometimes when I wear a head band and covering my hearing devices, they are sometimes even painful and very uncomfortable*

*I don't swim (I'm terrible at it) but I do get sore if I wear any hat or headband too long.*

Replying to "I also find it difficult to wear a helmet with a processor...": *The helmet can be quite tight and doesn't really help with our CI. Sometimes I had to find extra size which helps*

### **Impacts and damage to device**

Attendees were concerned about damage to the device if knocked, and had a range of advice, including not playing any hard contact sport including football. However, several were playing contact sports, including rugby, wearing a helmet. One reported hearing aids falling off on the ice pitch and getting broken.

*Never played any hard contact sports after having my CI (just started secondary school) as they told me it is forbidden. I missed out on a lot of stuff. Only could play soft football which was boring*

*volleyball: I find that nothing has been a problem so far. Hockey I've had issues with a helmet a lot – and rugby was my biggest struggle so far, having to wear a scrum cap annoyed me a lot and having to wear a headband to make sure I didn't get hit too hard.*

### **Moisture/rain/humidity**

Dealing with moisture was the next biggest issue whether it was rain, sweat, swimming or humidity.

*Irritating! I would love it if the technology for cochlear implants was advanced so much that they can make them completely water proof*

*we are obviously exposed to rain so when it rains, I have to sit on the bench because I could not practise football safely*

Swimming is a particular challenge in spite of ways of keeping the processor dry:

*I have no hearing when I am swimming which can be very dangerous, I don't usually wear swimming caps, it can be quite painful on top of my cochlear*

*using a water wear solution that sits over the top of the CI microphone muffles the sound a bit it is more muffled sounding because of the aqua kit. I just found it easier to lip read*

*Some people find that the noise and high reverberation in the pool area is a bit overwhelming –*

### **Tips for navigating experience of sports**

Raquel shared these tips and insights and then invited others' experiences

- Secure your processor – Headband, sport band, clips, etc.
- Be mindful of contact – Wear protective headgear when needed
- Use a drying kit – Remove moisture after sports or workouts
- Use visual cues – Hand signals
- Tell teammates & coaches – How to support you
- Wear a protective cover – For sweat, rain or water exposure

She also asked these questions which framed the rest of the discussions:

- What do you use to keep your processor secure during sports?
- How do you handle sweat or moisture when being active?
- How do you let teammates or coaches know about your cochlear implant?
- What communication strategies work best for you during games or practices?
- What tips or tools would you recommend to someone new to sports with a cochlear implant?

### **Raquel started with: to secure your processor**

There was a great deal of discussion about how to do this:

*like wearing a head band sport band or clips. For me personally when I do sports, I always wear my head band for my cochlear implant to stop it falling so it's very very important to secure processor if you can.*

*Volleyball - my CI would often fall off so I would wear a headband to keep it in place. For skiing my parents carved out a place where the magnet sits in the foam of the helmet to make it more comfortable.*

*My parents did the same with my bicycle helmet as a kid! I use ear huggies when playing sports and a stronger magnet, just for sports.*

*yes, I found that headband useful, thanks Raquel. Sometimes I used the rubber band where you can connect with your clothing*

*The head band for me it's like the basic stuff to wear. It's very easy to put on and basically it covers most of the sports which have some physical contact with the opponents' team but yes, basketball,*

*volleyball, football, I think it's a very needed equipment, so all the times where I practise any sport or I go running or whatever, I always put my head band on.*

*I do use clip-it on but it's not strong enough as a gymnast. When I was younger, I wore double -- clipping is always a way to prevent your processor from falling off. (Teacher with CI)*

*I do clip it on but it's not strong enough. As a gymnast when I was younger(!) I used double sided carpet tape! And it did work!*

*I like to do my hair around my CI making sure my hair goes over the top of the magnet to keep the coil in place.*

*Sometimes when I am swimming, I wear a headband to keep my devices in place.*

*I always wear a clip that is connected to my shirt and processor*

*I often issued a stronger magnet for sports when I was working as an Aud in the NHS - it's definitely worth chatting to your CI team if you are struggling with keeping the coil stable during heavy activities. (Audiologist)*

***Raquel again: And the next one is to be mindful of contact***

*It's very important to be careful especially if you are doing any contact sports, to protect your cochlear implant and to avoid any damages, so if you had the chance wear protective head gear when needed.*

***Raquel: And the next one is to use a drying kit.***

*Personally, I do this especially on the hot summer day or if I sweat a lot, and so once I've done my work out or doing sports. I just put my cochlear implant in the drying kit and I leave it there for a while to dry, and it's the best way to avoid damage to the cochlear implant.*

*This developed a conversation about ways to keep the processor dry which was a major issue:*

*I always use the electric drybox as soon as I feel it has gotten wet*

*I make sure my hair is up so the microphone in the cochlear implant is available to the air and not getting sweaty and I don't find that when it's too much of a problem during soccer. Your hair can actually cover the cochlear implant so that helps*

*Always use the electric dry kits and I totally agree.*

*I sometimes wear a water proof bucket hat and a light rain jacket when it is raining. I also wear a water proof case on my CI when I am swimming*

*If you are going to take a shower or something like don't take your CI off in the bathroom, take it off in a different room, give your CI a break from the moisture, and it helps the longevity. If you are certain brands of CI, you can change the mics in them like the filters, so doing that will often help to just for the sound quality, and things like that.*

*Nice tip about storing your CI outside of the bathroom Rachel! For AB wearers using the waterproof battery I also like a little can of compressed air to help get any trapped water out of ports and cable connections quickly after use. It's also helpful to rinse it off with clean tap water after swimming in the pool before drying it off.*

*You can use any dry box doesn't have to be CI specific any of the hearing aid one's work.*

*You get the little packets like when you buy shoes or when you buy something that comes in dry ingredients sometimes it comes in little packets of silica gel. Put them inside a box with your cochlear implant it might dry out some of the moisture*

*Maybe I can just put my cochlear implant just in a box in the box and put a pack of silica gel into it; with it, so it dries completely. Maybe. I don't know. We need to get creative like this.*

*When working as a chef I have to wear a hat and my head was sweating like literally sweating and I was worried about my cochlear implant getting wet. Obviously, I had to change the microphones more regularly because the sweat and the moisture was getting inside the cochlear implant and when the cochlear implant care said why don't you shave your hair a little bit more and OK I will shave my hair a bit more so I don't have to keep asking for microphone covers and since then I have had no problems.*

*I have definitely broken my fair share of processors from sweat and sometimes things fall off my head accidentally*

*And if you also have band like I am very very sweaty, I get wet so I bring multiple head bands with me and I might have to change it between games*

*yeah, the electronic dry kits are the best even the ones with the little beads and it's kind of the best you can do honestly.*

*Always use the electric dry box*

*I basically use CI dehumidifier every night to help with humidity*

### **Swimming**

In spite of attempts to manage the processor and keep it dry, swimming clearly remains a problem but there were creative ideas:

*The last one is to wear a protective cover example for sweat water or rainwater exposure like wearing an aqua kit or just something to cover your cochlear implants from water, could be very helpful.*

*We know a wearer who is a competitive synchronised swimmer. She wears her waterproof battery clipped to her bun as it is so strong and stiff once it is all done up for competition! She hears through the waterproof mic on her swimming headpiece. I liked the use of the hair bun to help hold the waterproof battery.*

*There are swim caps labelled for long hair and they are more loose and bigger*

*When jumping into water, am not a good swimmer I hold on to my ears and implants I would like some other ideas*

*I know some people also like to have a dedicated CI swimming programme that is a bit louder*

*I wonder if a soul cap might help for people who find swim caps too tight over their CI coils? They are designed for long and textured hair and are a bit looser on the top and sides of the head with a tighter band right at the start of the cap. <https://soulcap.com/>*

### **Managing communication with the team or the coach**

Raquel introduced the topic of how to manage communication with the team or coach or teacher: and this produced many ideas, including from teachers. Communication is obviously extremely important and there was a lively discussion about how to make this happen:

*I think this one is probably the most helpful tip that I can share is to tell your team mates and coaches, on how to support you because if you tell them I believe that you can make the experiences regarding sports much easier.*

*Use the visual cues like hand signals or for example for me I play soft ball and as I mentioned earlier, with the helmets sometimes it causes me too much of a problem, so I just take it off and I can't hear. So, what I do I just ask my team mates and and/or my coaches and share some signals so I know what to do and what to expect.*

Some signs could be helpful in addition to hearing the whistle:

*I also play football (as an adult), and always continued playing in the rain. I would let everyone on my team know when I had to take off my processors, & my coach and I had a few signs we would use (I don't know sign language). I also let the referees know, so they would wave to get my attention after the whistle blew.*

*When I did PE (Physical Education) at school, I taught my coaches some basic signs which they used. They blew the whistle a few times to signal my attention to give me a sign.*

*That's why I never volunteered to go first when I was at school... always waited for people to go first! (to see what to do!)*

*Yoga is very difficult, being able to see the instructor and follow routines*

There were several who had found it helpful to use radio aid systems or their phones with captions and messages...

*I use an FM system*

*When doing sports, I did like using the radio aid system, the coach wears the microphone and this helps, I agree. I've used it before. I called this FM system*

*I use a transmitter or a mini mic*

*It really helps me hear the coach or teacher*

*Your Roger receiver is inside your processor body -so it still works in the waterproof battery.*

*I really like live transcribe as a backup tool for tricky listening environments - it's not perfect but the tech is getting better and better and there is a live transcribe option already built into the accessibility menu for many modern phones. Live captioning helps lots of people. I have used it with my neurodivergent friends as well as friends working in their second language or friends with hearing loss.*

There was an exchange about new developments:

*Check out Xrai Glass! New technology which allows you to transcribe live conversations using AI. It's not perfect but helps me in conversations when people are talking*

Replying to "I really like live transcribe as a backup tool for...": *But...the glasses are tinted and the subtitles won't show on time*

Replying to "I really like live transcribe as a backup tool for...": *@Qais Khan Agreed, but the phone app itself helps without needing the glasses*

*Deaf Sport UK have some nice tips for coaches who want to keep things accessible*

### **Role of coaches and teachers**

There was a long conversation about how coaches, teachers and the team needed to know how they could help:

*My coaches and teammates were absolutely the best to help me make my practices more inclusive!!*

*Before any new activities or new coaches, I talk to coaches/teachers in private to explain how my CI works and I also tell them how to make some of my practices inclusive to me. I used to do Judo and my coach would write the move I should practice on a white board, for example. I'm very good at lip reading so I would also instruct them to talk to me with their face turned towards me.*

*I just make sure my coaches know if I will need them to repeat sometimes and make sure, they know the situation when travelling with teams*

*I have created a power point slide about me and my hearing loss to present to my teachers.*

*I think it's important to ask coaches to share sport specific vocabulary and lingo with the athlete ahead of time.*

*I say I am deaf and I use cochlear implants so you need to face me when you speak and you need to be careful when you are speaking. I am deaf I cannot understand you and that's, you know, it's not because I am being rude or anything because I am deaf so I just tell them right away, so they don't have to second guess how to communicate with me.*

*When I was a kid, I used to do judo, and I remember my mum was so afraid when I told her I wanted to do judo because it's the physical sports, and she was okay I am going to talk to the coach, so we can like start out idea of how we can make this work. She talked to the coach and he was Oh no worries, we have like a board I can write her the moves she needs to make so I think it's really important to talk to them before the activity or the practice or new coaches because they can be really helpful, they can have an ideas that even us can't have/ So it was really nice being a kid and having a coach that it was like it was important to him that I made this class.*

*They can be really helpful and the team mates are also like really important; I remember when I did judo the class would, like, hit the floor so I can feel when they were cheering for me, so it was really nice to see how sensible they were about my deafness. So yeah, it's really nice and just talk to them, they can be really helpful.*

*before class I would talk to them, like, can you give just the instructions of the class and then later I can just do it. if you need to talk to me or anything just like tap me on the shoulder or something and then I can face you and we can do a lip reading. So that's also really good tip about specific vocabulary and this kind of stuff. So, I usually did that before class,*

*It's they were just saying, do this and that means it's time to run or don't run don't move, just some signals or even like the tap on the shoulder, you know, so yep. It's very helpful to have some*

*communication because it can go a long way when you are talking to your coaches and team mates to know what to do and any type of communication.*

*Sometimes when the coach was standing far away and the coach doesn't have to go all the way to the head of you so you can grab your phone number and text easily,*

Check out your national Deaf teams to connect with other CI users in competitive sports. I play with the Canadian National Volleyball team and that is where I learned about different headband brands and accessibility

### **Final key messages:**

The group clearly felt that sport was a key part of their lives and that it is important to overcome any challenges:

*My tip is to don't be afraid of trying a new sport, it's really nice and like it should give you empowerment, so if you are not feeling it don't to force yourself.*

*Don't be afraid if you have to take your implants off, I think it's part of the process as well. Just talk to the coach, talk to your team mates and it's important that everyone makes you feel comfortable as well. So just don't be afraid of trying, it's really nice, that's my tip, don't be afraid to have them on or to have them off.*

*Always know you can ask for help, you are always allowed to ask for help; do not be afraid to ask for help, do not be afraid to talk to the coaches and your team mates on how to best support you.*

*Yes, don't be afraid to advocate for yourself, it's always, always important to advocate for yourself. Like we all have the right to play sports, so we want to make it easy for us*

*Yes, remember that it is your right to have access to sport!*

But that communication is always important and that not everything will be accessible:

*communication matters in sports and good communication is important, super important like you have to let your team mates know and coaches know about your cochlear implant that can help a lot and also that we have to keep in mind that some sports that we are aware that not all of are accessible, and that happens, and that that's what it is*

*Always know you can ask for help. You are always allowed to ask for help.*

*Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself*

### **Summary**

While participating in Sports is clearly an important part of life for these young people there are many practical issues for them to overcome with wearing the technology effectively – and in some cases they had given up for a particular sport, when sweat, water or falling off, getting damaged. Many practical tips given – and the group had a really positive approach to overcoming these issues.

*Websites:*

**<https://cochlearimplanthelp.com/journey/leisure-activities/sports/> -**

We look forward to the next Conversation!

CIICA, Jan 2026