

India

Caregiver Name: Dimple
Age at Implantation: 13 months

Child: Akshita
Age Today: 20 years

I am a mother from India, and this is the story of my daughter, Akshita, who is a cochlear implant recipient. She was born on April 16, 2005. At the time of her birth, we had no idea that she had hearing loss. Like any new parents, we were raising her normally, full of dreams and hopes for her future.

After a few months, her grandfather noticed that she was not responding to sounds. That was the moment her journey began. **With the help of her grandfather, who is a pediatrician, we were connected to doctors that guided us step-by-step through the cochlear implant process.** Within two months of detection, on May 3, 2006, Akshita received her first cochlear implant in her right ear. She was only 13 months old and was one of the youngest babies in North India to receive a cochlear implant at that time.

Our biggest challenge during those early years was managing therapy, travel and family responsibilities. For speech therapy and mapping sessions, I had to travel 3-4 hours from our town to the city twice a week. At the same time, I had another young daughter at home who was just 4 years old. Leaving her behind with her father and grandparents was emotionally difficult. Financially, we were not very strong. At the time, we could only afford one implant.

But we were never alone. **Our greatest support came from our family, who supported us morally and financially.** Our doctors and therapy teams were also a huge source of strength. Because of speech therapy, mapping sessions and continuous practice at home, Akshita slowly started hearing and communicating. She went to school, made friends and participated in extracurricular activities like any other child.

As she grew older, we noticed she still struggled with detecting sounds from all directions. After consulting doctors again, we were advised to go for a second implant for her left ear. This would help her hear sounds from both sides and improve her overall sound awareness.

Ten years after her first implant, on January 28, 2016, she received her second cochlear implant. Initially, she felt discomfort but with regular mapping sessions and support, she adapted well. Through this journey, we understood the importance of bilateral implantation at a younger age, as children adapt more easily.

Today, our greatest achievement is seeing our daughter live confidently and independently. She is now 20 years old and is pursuing her bachelor's degree in computer science. For the last 4 years, she has been living independently in a hostel, managing her studies and daily life on her own. For us as parents, this is the biggest success, seeing her grow into a strong and confident young woman.

To improve access to cochlear implantation for our child, we made many changes, such as regular travel for therapy, strict therapy routines at home and learning how to support her communication development daily. Awareness, persistence and family unity helped us overcome many barriers.

Our journey has had many ups and downs, but it has been full of learning, strength and gratitude. We are deeply thankful to our family and the medical team involved for guiding and supporting us through this journey.