

# SUNDAY Express



SUNDAY EXPRESS October 1 1995

## Cheer for bat-eared babies

**P**ARENTS of babies with "bat ears" may no longer have to wait years for surgery, thanks to an innovative treatment developed by a London plastic surgeon.

The Mount Vernon Hospital consultant surgeon David Gault has invented a cheap and safe alternative to surgical correction — a simple splint to reshape babies' ears.

"Babies who are born with problem ears that stick out have until now had to wait until they are five years old, at the earliest, before surgery can correct the problem," says Mr Gault.

*"Many children spend their early years being the butt of other children's jokes."*

"My device is a comfy splint which can be fitted by parents on their baby's ears, and can correct the problem in as little time as three weeks."

Mr Gault believes that the earlier treatment is started, the better — preferably before an infant is three months old.

"The splints work for the same reason that surgery cannot be performed on babies' ears. The

**By Helene Feger**  
Health Correspondent

cartilage is extremely soft and although it will not hold stitches, it is easy to mould."

The splints are made of wire, cushioned with medical grade plastic that can be fitted on to the ear and then taped back.

"The procedure is extremely simple and can be done by parents or their GP while the baby sleeps. There is no need for anaesthetic."

Mr Gault claims that the splints are much safer than surgical treatment.

Last January teenager Janine Connor died six days after having

her ears pinned back at Withington Hospital in Manchester.

And, in rare cases, children can develop infections in the skin of the ear that require its removal, Mr Gault explained.

*The "ear buddies" should be worn 24 hours a day including during sleep. But they can be removed at bath time.*

Mr Gault has fitted ear buddies on about 50 young patients — and they worked in about two-thirds of cases, he says.

In one case a baby had an allergic reaction to the plastic but the problem disappeared when the splints were removed.

The doctor's initial interest in

finding an alternative to conventional plastic surgery for ear problems was entirely personal.

"My first child was born with a kink in the ear known as Stahl's Bar," he recalls. "It is difficult to re-set surgically, but it's a doddle to fix with splints."

Since then Mr Gault has successfully fitted two more of his children with splints.



HOME GOAL: David Gault with his children