

# Nine-month-old Ella Dampf to receive cochlear implant

By Angie Hutschreider  
News Tribune

***In a world where recessive and dominant genes can be identified and where genes linked to illnesses can be traced, the Dampf family is still left wondering why.***

*Michelle and Jeffrey Dampf both have perfect hearing, and so do two of their four children. However, their oldest daughter, Catherine, 6, and their youngest daughter, Ella, 9 months, both have a profound hearing loss.*

*Catherine was diagnosed at 10 months old. She received her first cochlear implant when she was 15 months old and her second when she was 5, just about a year ago.*

*Ella's hearing loss was detected during an exam at birth. Michelle said at that point they had an "inkling" the infant was also deaf. At about a month old she was officially diagnosed as being deaf after an Auditory Brainstem Response Test was performed.*

*"Which was really hard to handle because we were told Catherine's hearing loss was not genetic," Michelle said. "So it was the same blow all over again."*

*Michelle said hearing aids do not help either girl. "The hearing aids don't help them to be able to hear but they do help stimulate the auditory nerve that takes the sound into the brain."*

*Stimulation of the auditory nerve, using hearing aides, is a vital part of the preparation for the cochlear implants. Dr. Jaques Herzog, ear surgeon at the Center for Hearing and Balance Disorders with St. Luke's Hospital in St. Louis, treats both Catherine and Ella.*

*Ella is scheduled to have her first implant surgery on Valentine's Day. She will get the external component on March 9, then she will begin an intensive therapy program to help her develop her hearing and speech skills.*

*Herzog has done the procedure on another patient at nine months old and had amazing results, he said. "It was quite amazing to see the other patient, after the external device was turned on and therapy begun, to reach for the implant when it was removed, because they wanted it back on so they could hear. That was something."*



Nine-month-old Ella Dampf plays Wednesday at her parent's house. Ella was born with a hearing impairment and will soon receive a cochlear implant. She is wearing a hearing aid in her left ear. (Kelley McCall/News Tribune)

*The internal component of the device is the receiver and electrode system, which contains the electronic circuits that receive signals from the external system and sends electrical currents to the inner ear. The external component is a microphone, sound processor and transmitter system.*

*Through their experiences with Catherine, Michelle and Jeffrey know what to expect with the surgery and the following days, weeks and years of therapy.*

*The most upsetting part of the procedure will be when the external device is turned on March 9. "She will cry and be very upset," Michelle said. "It is very overwhelming to have all of this sound coming in when she never heard it before."*

*Ella will be eligible for the second implant to be placed within four to six weeks, or when the family is ready, Herzog said. "The device turns on a sense the child was not born with."*

*By implanting the device on Ella at such a young age, Herzog said the goal is that she will not need therapy for as long as patients do who have the device implanted when they are older. "The main goal with the device is to implant it as soon as we can so the patient can begin and end school on time, with their age group."*

*Catherine is doing well with her device and still attends therapy at the Moog Center for Deaf Education for speech and language therapy. "They are amazing and have done phenomenal things with Catherine," Michelle said.*

*The girls have an added advantage, Michelle is a speech-language pathologist and keeps her skills sharp by helping tutor Catherine.*

*"The device is 20 percent equipment and 80 percent therapy," she said. "After getting the device they literally have to be taught how to hear and process what they are hearing. Sometimes this is a long process but the sooner the implant is done the better."*

*The Dampf family is excited and looking forward to the procedure, ready to get Ella on the path her sister has done so well on.*

*"When the external device gets turned on is the best part," Michelle said. "They become more animated and love musical toys. It was so nice to be able to sit down with Catherine and read a book for the first time."*