
What is cleft palate repair?

Your child had surgery to repair their cleft palate. The surgery repairs the cleft (separation) and joins the palate (roof of the mouth) muscles and tissues together again. It also provides enough length in the palate so your child can eat and learn to speak properly.

You will need to take special steps to help the palate incision heal. Every child's surgery is different. Talk with your child's doctor about specific care for your child. Some guidelines to follow are listed below.

How should I feed my child?

- Keep your child's head upright during feeding and for 20 to 30 minutes after feedings. This is to help them swallow.
- For a baby:
 - You may breastfeed or use a bottle to feed your child after surgery.
 - If using a bottle, do not use a Haberman nipple.
- For a child:
 - Give food and drinks from a cup, rubber-tipped syringe or side of a spoon. This includes juices, such as apple, grape or cherry, and milk.
 - Keep the cup and the spoon on your child's lips. Do not place any forks, spoons or knives in your child's mouth.
 - Give your child soft, smooth foods (nothing harder than mashed potatoes). Place a rubber-tipped spoon sideways at your child's mouth and tip the food into your child's mouth.
 - You may try giving soups, shakes, ice cream and pudding. You may also try thinned, warm cereals (like oatmeal), baby foods or blended foods.
 - Avoid giving your child any crunchy or chewy foods, such as potato chips, cookies, popcorn, nuts, raisins and hard candy.
- Your doctor may want your child to drink from a rubber-tipped syringe. Place only the rubber tip (not the whole syringe) into your child's mouth. Push the fluids in slowly and away from the roof of the mouth.
- After feedings, rinse your child's mouth with water. This is to help keep food from getting into the sutures (stitches) and to wash bits of food from the roof of the mouth.
- Your child may eat less at feedings. They may need to be fed more often.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

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How should I care for the wound?

- Avoid putting anything directly in your child's mouth that may injure the wound (suture line).
- If your child is taking an antibiotic, give it as ordered. Do not stop giving this medicine just because your child feels better.
- Follow the doctor's directions to help manage your child's pain.
- It is OK to give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand). Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
 - Do not give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months of age without a doctor's order.
 - Do not give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in 24 hours.
 - If your child has any type of liver problem, talk with the doctor before giving acetaminophen.
- It is OK to give your child ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand). Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
 - Do not give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months of age without a doctor's order.
- The doctor may order a medicine called gabapentin. Follow the doctor's directions for giving it to your child.
- If possible, try to keep your child from crying forcefully as it may pull on the sutures (stitches). Hold, comfort and feed your child to help lessen crying.

What else do I need to know?

- Use your child's elbow immobilizers (also called welcome sleeves) on for 2 weeks or as advised by the doctor. This to help keep your child from putting things into their mouth.
 - You may remove the elbow immobilizers while you are watching or holding your child.
 - Remove them at least every 2 hours during the day. This is to check for skin problems.
 - Massage and exercise your child's elbows at these times. Do not let your child's hand or other objects near their mouth.
- Elbow immobilizers may make your child clumsy, so watch for falls. Make sure their shoelaces are tied and pants cuffs are turned up. Avoid toys that could cause your child to fall, such as tricycles or rocking horses.
- **Do not** let your child lie on their stomach. Place them on their side or back and keep the head of the bed raised. This is to help decrease swelling.
- Take your child to their follow-up visit as advised. Most often, it will be 3 to 4 weeks after surgery.
- Babies may use a rattle or teething ring but no pacifiers.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor if your child:

- Has increased drainage or bleeding from the mouth
- Has a fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher).
- Will not eat or drink.

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- Has pain that does not get better from the medicine that the doctor prescribed. Mild earaches are common after surgery. You do not need to call unless the pain is so bad that your child cannot play, sleep or be comforted.
- Has a white coating on the palate or tongue. This may be thrush.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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