



CLEFT PALATE REPAIR POST-OPERATIVE PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS

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Feeding

- Your child's palate is repaired with dissolving stitches but the repair is delicate for several months after surgery. For the repair to heal well, your child should not put anything hard in his/her mouth.
 - **Do not give your child a pacifier or bottle. This could damage the stitches.**
 - Give your child **only liquids** for the first 10 days, using a cup or spoon. Use the side of the spoon only and do not insert past the lips. Use a sippy cup that pours easily and has a short spout that does not touch the palate. Bring the cup your child uses at home to the hospital so the team can evaluate it.
 - Offer small amounts of cool liquids every 1 to 2 hours when your child is awake. This will keep the mouth and palate moist and clean.

- Your child's diet after surgery will progress as follows:
 - **Day of surgery and Day 1 after surgery: clear liquids.** Some examples are breast milk, apple juice, water, Jell-O, cranberry juice, popsicles (taken off the stick) or clear broth.
 - **Days 2-9: thick liquids.** Some examples are formula, milk, yogurt, thin cooked cereals, puddings, ice cream, creamed soups, thinned pureed foods, or Stage I baby foods.
 - **Day 10 to 6 weeks: soft foods.** Some examples are mashed potatoes, cereal soaked in milk, cooked vegetables, finely ground meats, pasta, bananas, or canned fruits.

- After thick fluids or soft foods, rinse the palate with water using a cup or syringe for 4 weeks (be sure not to touch the palate with the syringe). The palate should be rinsed at least 4 times per day.
- Do not feed hard foods, such as hard toast, potato chips, bread sticks, pretzels, or hard candy. Hard foods could damage the stitches.
- Sometimes your child's nose may get stuffy. This may make it difficult for your child to eat. You can try saline nose drops found in any pharmacy. If the drops don't clear your child's nose, gently use a nasal aspirator or bulb syringe to clean the nose.
- Liquid may drip from your child's nose after eating. This can occur for up to 3 months after surgery and is not unusual. You may need to clear his/her nose with the bulb suction.

Activity

- Your child may play gently. He or she may enjoy being read to, playing with toys, and going for stroller walks.
- **Watch your child closely at all times. Nothing should be put in his or her mouth while it heals.** The palate is not fully healed until about 6 weeks after the operation.
- Dress your child in the protective arm sleeves you received for 6 weeks.

- Remove the protective sleeves several times a day to exercise your child's arms. Take off only one sleeve at a time, so that your child will not be able to put anything in the mouth.
- Your child's doctor will tell you when your child can return to daycare or school.

Pain control

- Your child may have some mild discomfort at home. If your infant is irritable and not feeding well, he/she may be in pain. Give acetaminophen (Tylenol), as directed by your doctor. Acetaminophen comes as a tablet, caplet, and liquid. (Should we even mention the tablets and caplets if we're telling parents to put nothing hard in the child's mouth?) It is used to relieve mild to moderate pain and to reduce fever. Be sure to follow the instructions of your doctor to ensure proper dosing.
- If your child has more than mild discomfort, the doctor may prescribe additional medicine to ease the pain. Give pain medicine as prescribed and instructed by your doctor.
- Try to schedule a dose of pain medicine around bedtime, especially for the first few days at home. This may help your child sleep better.
- Keep track of your child's bowel habits. He or she should return to usual bowel habits within a week of surgery. If your child does not have a bowel movement every day, he or she may be constipated. Call your child's doctor or nurse if you think your child is constipated.

Emotional Recovery

- After a cleft palate repair, your child may be tired or irritable. Healing for each child is different.
- It is important for your child to rest. In time your child will return to his or her usual activities.
- Sleep disturbances are common the first two weeks.

Follow-up

- Your child will need to return for a follow up visit in 1-2 weeks. Call your child's surgeon at 401-444-2299 to arrange the appointment.
- Your child will have a second follow up 6-8 weeks after surgery with the surgeon, as well as with a speech therapist.

When to Call Your Child's Doctor

Call if your child:

- has a fever over 101.5°F degrees;
- has bleeding from the mouth;
- has foul smelling odor or drainage;
- has pain that doesn't go away after giving medicine for pain; or
- vomits or is not drinking liquids.