

# Caring for Your Child After Cleft Palate Surgery



## Cleft Palate Program

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4  
604-875-2345 • 1-888-300-3088  
[www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca)

### Cleft Palate Surgery

The cleft (split) in the roof of your baby's mouth (palate) has been repaired. Your baby's mouth will be sore for several days while it heals.

Your baby is also learning to swallow using this new palate. She will need some special care for the next couple of weeks.

### Feeding

Your baby may not be as eager to eat and drink for the first few days.

Here are some ways to encourage him:

- Offer small feedings often. He will take more food this way.
- Feed about 30 minutes after giving pain medication when his mouth is less sore.
- For the first two weeks after surgery give only soft food. This allows time for the palate to heal. Give your baby nothing harder than mashed potatoes and nothing that might scrape or irritate the palate.
- Many babies prefer eating soft food to drinking milk or formula in the weeks just after surgery. This is because they are learning how to swallow with the new palate. As long as baby is eating and has a wet diaper every few hours, do not worry about the fact that he drinks less milk!
- Feed your child with a small spoon or from the side of a larger spoon. **DO NOT** feed from a fork or through a drinking straw. They may scratch the palate.
- It is best not to let your child feed himself for the first few weeks after surgery. The palate may be numb. A young child can damage the incision line with a spoon and not feel any discomfort.

### Do not give these foods for two weeks: they can hurt the palate:

- Toast, bread crusts, hard cookies, crackers, biscuits or potato chips.
- Peanut butter or melted cheese - these stick to the palate.
- Popsicles on a stick unless you hold the popsicle just at the front of the mouth.
- Ice chips, they are sharp.

### For another 3-4 weeks, do not give your child:

- Crunchy foods such as raw apples, raw carrots and popcorn.
- Citrus fruits and juices tomatoes and spicy foods. These may sting the healing areas in the mouth
- Hot food may burn the palate. Serve only cold or lukewarm foods.

### Mouth Care

Give sips of water to clean the mouth after a feeding. This leaves the mouth clean and comfortable and helps the palate heal.

Try to keep the area around the mouth and nostrils clean and dry so the skin doesn't get irritated. If the lips are very dry, apply a little water-based lubricant to soften them.

### Protecting the mouth

Nothing should go into the mouth other than the nipple, soother or small spoon for feeding.

To protect the suture line (stitches) while the palate is healing, your child needs to wear arm splints or a restraint jacket. She will wear these for 10 days from the day of surgery, or as advised by your plastic surgeon. The splints or jacket allow your baby to move her arms at the shoulders but prevent

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the elbows from bending to put fingers or toys into the mouth.

The hospital will lend you a pair of splints or 2 jackets\*. You may need to adjust the size of the jacket to make a snug fit. The nurses will show you how to do this before you leave.

Remove the splints or restraint jacket to bath your baby and to exercise the arms several times a day. DO NOT leave your baby alone without the splints or restraint jacket at any time.

Your baby will get used to wearing the splints or restraint jacket but give some extra cuddles and play during this time.

**REMEMBER:** Being careful and protecting the incision will allow your baby's mouth to heal well.

**\*IMPORTANT:**

Please return the splints or restraint jackets to the hospital or your plastic surgeon's office as soon as you have finished with them. If you are from out of town, mail the jackets to:

BC Children's Hospital  
Cleft Palate Program – ACB – K2-166  
4480 Oak Street  
Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4

### Ear and Throat Care

If your child had tubes put into his ears when the palate was repaired, the nurses will give you information about ear care. You may need to buy earplugs to keep water out of the middle ears during baths, shampoos or swimming. Ask your Ear, Nose and Throat doctor to discuss earplugs with you.

For a few weeks, try to keep your child away from people with colds or sore throats. A cold or throat infection will make your child very uncomfortable.

**Please note:** Children with a cleft palate should **NOT** have their adenoids removed. It will make their speech sound nasal. If your child has tonsillitis often, and a doctor suggests removing tonsils & adenoids, discuss this with the Cleft Palate Program staff before you do anything.

### Pain or Discomfort

Your child will recover from surgery very quickly. She may be uncomfortable for 1-2 days after going home and need some pain medication. Your plastic surgeon and the nurse will talk with you about how much and how to give the medication.

You can also soothe your child with cuddles, talking and playing.

Sometimes for a few weeks, children are more irritable, clingy and insecure. They may not sleep through the night. Give a little extra attention. Your baby will soon return to his normal self.

### Please call your surgeon if:

- You notice any bleeding from the mouth or nose.
- Your child develops a fever.

### Follow Up

Your child should be seen by your plastic surgeon or family doctor 6-8 weeks after the surgery. If your child had tubes put into the ears, call the Ear, Nose and Throat doctor for a follow-up appointment for 6-8 weeks after the surgery. Your child should have a hearing test done at the same time.

The Cleft Palate Program will arrange a follow-up team visit when your child is about 18 months of age.

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**For questions or concerns, please contact:**

**Plastic Surgeon:** \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cleft Palate Program: 604-875-3146**

**Nurse Clinician:  
604-875-2345 local 7057**

Toll free: 1-888-300-3088

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**Notes:**