

# The Orthodontic Appliance for Newborns with Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate



## Cleft Palate Program

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[www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca)

### What is the Neonatal Orthodontic Appliance?

It is a small plastic plate to cover the cleft (to the palate). The orthodontist makes it within the first two weeks of your baby's life. If your baby also has a cleft lip, the gap in the lip is closed with tape.

### Why does my baby need it?

#### The Plate:

- It will keep your baby's tongue out of the cleft and may help narrow the cleft.
- It can make feeding easier because it provides a hard surface to press the nipple against.
- It may help stop some of the food from coming out of the nose.

#### The Tape:

- It narrows the cleft in the upper lip.
- Together the plate and tape bring the gum and lip into position, making it easier to close the cleft during lip and palate surgery.

### How is the plate made?

#### *This is done in two steps.*

1. A mould is made of the palate in the daycare surgery unit.

You will receive written instructions from the Cleft Palate Program.

Your baby will need to fast before this procedure. A nurse from day care surgery will call you with instructions.

2. The Orthodontist forms a plastic plate from the mould.

The Orthodontist will give you a time to have the plate fitted. This is usually the next day.

At the plate fitting, your orthodontist will show you how to put the plate in and take it out.

If your baby has a cleft lip, the Orthodontist will teach you how to tape your baby's lip.

### How long must my baby wear the plate?

We would like your baby to wear the plate until palate surgery. We believe that the longer the plate is in the mouth the better the results. If you can, keep the plate in for 24 hours a day (except for cleaning).

### How do I clean the plate?

About once or twice a day, after feeding, remove the plate and brush with a toothbrush and cool water.

***Please do not boil or heat the plate.***

### Will the plate bother my baby?

Your baby should feel comfortable wearing the plate. It may take a day or so to get used to. When you first learn to put the plate in, your baby may gag. You and baby will get used to this and the gagging will stop.

If you and your baby has trouble placing the plate, here are some tips:

- Cuddle your baby while holding the plate in place.
- Dip the plate in breast milk or formula and your baby will suck it into place.

If the plate seems loose, stick it in place with a small dab of denture cream (polygrip) on each side.

## What about taping?

The Orthodontist will show you the best way to tape the lip.

Taping takes 2 people until you have practice. One person holds the baby's head still. The other person tapes the lip. **Remember: Put the plate in before you tape.** Taping without the plate can push the lip, gums and nose into a poor position and the plate will no longer fit.

### Taping:

Attach the end of the tape to one side of the cheek (usually on the cheekbone). Stretch the tape across the upper lip until the sides of the lip look pale and white and the gap is as narrow as possible. Press the other end of the tape firmly in place on the other cheek. Change the tape only if the gap opens.

## What if my baby has a rash from the taping?

- If you can, cut down on the number of times you change the tape.
- Tape different spots on the baby's cheeks each time you change the tape.
- Keep the cheeks as clean and dry as possible.
- If the rash does not clear, call the Nurse Clinician or the Orthodontist who made the plate.

## The plate seems loose - what do I do?

***Make an appointment with the Orthodontist so that he/she can check the fit of the plate.***

At about 6 months of age, some babies learn how to remove the plate with their tongue. Try extra denture cream on the plate to help keep it in place.

It may just be too hard to keep the plate in all day once baby gets into playing with it. Do the best you can. Keep it in as much as possible, even if this is only overnight or at feeding time. By 6 months your baby has already benefited from wearing the plate.

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

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

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

Toll free: 1-888-300-3088

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**Notes:**