

Caring for Your Child After Cleft Lip Surgery



Cleft Palate Program

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4
604-875-2345 • 1-888-300-3088
www.bcchildrens.ca

Cleft Lip Surgery

The cleft(split) in your baby's lip has been repaired. Your baby's mouth will be sore for several days while it heals. She will need some special care for the next couple of weeks.

Feeding

Feeding will not be easy for your baby for a few days after surgery. Her lip will be swollen, numb and uncomfortable so small feedings more often may help. Try comforting your baby by talking, singing, and rocking during feedings.

You can bottle or breastfeed your baby. Breastfeed your baby in the usual position. Sit baby up to bottle-feed. When you burp him, face him away from your body to avoid bumping the lip against you.

You can start solid foods, e.g., pablum, whenever you and your doctor agree that baby is ready for them. Most babies start solids around 6 months of age.

Protecting the healing lip and nose

Being extra careful to protect the lip from bumps and rubs for the first 10 days while it heals will allow the lip and nose to heal well. The result will be a thinner scar.

Arm splints or a restraint jackets will help protect the lip

Babies put everything into their mouth. The hospital will lend you 1 pair of arm splints or 2 restraint jackets*. The arm splints or restraint jacket allows your baby to move her arms at the shoulders. It stops her from bending her elbows to put fingers or toys into her mouth. The nurses will show you how to dress your baby in the splints or jacket. You may need to adjust the size of the jacket to make a snug fit.

We strongly suggest that you DO NOT leave your baby alone without the arm splints or restraint jacket for 10 days from the day of surgery. Your plastic surgeon may suggest a shorter or longer time.

Remove the arm splints or restraint jacket only when

- you bathe your baby.
- you exercise the arms. Do this three or four times each day to prevent stiffness

Some babies will fuss more than others until they get used to wearing the restraints. Give extra cuddles and playtimes.

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

Position your baby on the back not the stomach

Settle your baby to sleep on her back, not tummy, so that her lip does not rub on the sheet/mattress. The nurses will show you how to position your baby in the crib to protect the lip.

During the day, your baby will be more comfortable if you change his position - sometimes lying down and sometimes sitting up. An infant seat will keep your baby in a good position to protect the lip. It will also allow you to keep your baby with you wherever you are.

Prevent unexpected bumps to the lip and nose

Try to avoid excited hugs and play with older brothers and sisters for about 3 weeks. Toys such as flying frisbees and balls can hurt your baby's healing lip & nose.

Care of the incision line

DO NOT shift or remove the steri-strips on your baby's lip.

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Your plastic surgeon will tell you when the steri-strips should be removed. The steri-strips usually fall off on their own in about 5-7 days. If they have not fallen off, within the week, your surgeon may remove them in the office 5-6 days after surgery, or may ask your family doctor or you to do it. **If they come off sooner than 5 days after surgery, don't try to replace them, call your plastic surgeon.**

Try not to touch the incision line. But, if the lip or nose become very messy with formula or nose drips, clean it to prevent dry, hard crust from forming on the incision line. **Always wash your hands before touching the incision line.**

Clean the incision carefully:

- **Do not** remove the steri-strips.
- Use cotton-tipped swabs with cooled, boiled water.
- Gently roll the swab up and down beside but not across the incision line. You may need to do this more than once. Use a clean swab each time.
- **Try to clean blood or crusts away so they don't harden on the incision line. If the dried crusts do not soak off during cleaning leave them alone.**

Each baby's scar heals at a different rate. It can take up to 2 years for the scar to soften and fade to its final appearance.

Pain or Discomfort

Your baby may be more difficult to settle for a few days following surgery. This behaviour is normal. A little extra rocking, holding, cuddling and talking to your baby will help to soothe her. Offer a soother if this comforts her.

Your surgeon and the nurses will discuss the type and dose of pain medication with you before you take baby home. Give the pain medication regularly for the first 24 - 48 hours. This will prevent the pain rising. It will keep your baby comfortable. Your baby will rest more, be less irritable and heal better. Your baby will feed more easily if the pain medication is given regularly. Try to feed your baby. It will be easier for your baby to feed well if you time feeding for about 30 minutes after the medication.

After 48 hours most babies need much less, if any, medication.

If your baby has been wearing an orthodontic appliance

1. Your surgeon may place it back in the mouth at the end of the operation. But, sometimes the surgeon leaves it out until the lip is healed. If the appliance is in your baby's mouth after

surgery, do not remove it for one week - not even to clean. After one week you can remove and clean the appliance as usual.

2. If the appliance is not in when your baby returns from surgery, leave it out for one week. If feeding is hard for your baby without the appliance, contact your surgeon or orthodontist.
3. Check the fit of the appliance 2-3 weeks after surgery, or sooner, if it is loose. Please contact the orthodontist who made the appliance for an appointment.

Please call your plastic surgeon if:

- You notice your baby's lip is very red or very damp and sticky
- The incision opens
- Your baby has a fever
- Your baby stops feeding or is very irritable even after medication and comforting.

Follow Up

Your baby will recover quickly from a cleft lip repair. In a few days she will be feeding and behaving as she was before the surgery.

Your plastic surgeon will advise about follow-up appointments. Please keep these appointments. If you have any concerns about your baby's care, call your plastic surgeon, family doctor or the nurse clinician on the Cleft Palate Program.

For questions or concerns, please contact:

Cleft Palate Program: 604-875-3146

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

Toll free: 1-888-300-3088

Plastic Surgeon: _____

Phone #: _____

Notes: