

# Family Education Sheet



## Home Care Instructions for Patients after Cleft Palate Repair (for patients of Dr. Meara)

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This sheet gives you information on caring for your child after cleft palate surgery.

### **Nutrition**

- **Do not give your child a pacifier or bottle, unless approved by your surgeon. They could damage the stitches.**
- Give your child **only liquids** for the first 10 days (this includes the days in the hospital). Only give the liquids using a spoon or sippy cup. Use the side of the spoon. Use a sippy cup that pours easily and has a spout that does not touch the palate. Bring the cup your child uses at home to the hospital. You may use a "Ross Nipple" with most of the top cut off. Nuby® cups and Avent® cups without the valves are fine also.
- Offer small amounts of cool liquids every 1 to 2 hours when your child is awake. This will keep the mouth and palate moist.
- Your child's diet will progress as follows:

**From discharge until post-operative day 9: Full liquids.** Some examples are formula, milk, yogurt, thin cooked cereals, puddings, ice cream, creamed soups, thinned pureed foods, or Stage I baby foods. Full liquids should drip off a spoon easily.

**Day 10 to 6 weeks: Soft foods.** Some examples are mashed potatoes; cereal soaked in milk, cooked vegetables, finely ground meats, pasta, or canned fruits.

- Give sips of water after the full fluids or soft foods to rinse the palate. The palate should be rinsed at least 4 times per day for 3-4 weeks.
- Do not give any hard foods, such as hard toast, crackers, bread sticks, pretzels, or hard cereal. Hard foods could damage the stitches. Your child's doctor will tell you when these foods will be allowed.
- Sometimes your child's nose may get stuffy. This may make it difficult for your child to eat. Clear the nose with saline nose drops, available in any drug store. If the nose drops don't clear your child's nose, you can use a nasal aspirator or bulb syringe. This must be done very gently. (See ["Using a Bulb Suction Aspirator with Your Baby"](#)).
- 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 the nose with the bulb suction.

### **Activity**

- Once at home, your child may walk and play quietly. He or she may enjoy being read to, playing with toys, and going for stroller walks.
- **Watch your child closely at all times. It is very important that your child put nothing in his or her mouth while it heals.** The palate is not fully healed until about six weeks after the operation. Sometimes your surgeon will want your child to wear protective sleeves to keep his/her hands out of the mouth.

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- Avoid toys that can fit into the baby's mouth. Soft teething rings can be used.

### ***Pain***

- Your child may have some mild discomfort at home. If your infant is irritable and not feeding well, he or she may be in pain. Give acetaminophen (Tylenol®), as directed by your child's doctor. Acetaminophen comes as a tablet, caplet, and liquid. It is used to relieve mild to moderate pain and to reduce fever. It is very important to take acetaminophen exactly as directed by your doctor. Follow the directions on the package and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain any part you do not understand. Do not take more or less of it than prescribed by your doctor. Do not take it any more often than prescribed by your doctor.
- If your child has more than mild discomfort, the doctor may prescribe medicine to help ease the pain. Give pain medicine as prescribed and instructed by your doctor and nurse.
- Try to schedule a dose of pain medicine around bedtime, especially for the first few days at home. This may help your child to sleep better.

### ***Emotional Recovery***

- Sleep disturbances are common the first two weeks.

### ***Follow-up***

- Please call Dr. Meara's office upon discharge for a follow-up appointment in 4 weeks.

### ***When to Call Your Child's Doctor***

Call if your child:

- has a fever over 100.5°F degrees;
- has any bleeding or drainage or foul odor from the mouth;
- has pain that doesn't go away after giving medicine for pain; or
- is vomiting or is not drinking liquids

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A **Spanish** version of this is available from your provider

Send comments or questions to: **[Familyed@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:Familyed@childrens.harvard.edu)**

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