



# Family Education Sheet



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

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

### ***Nutrition***

- **Do not give your child a pacifier or bottle. They 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. 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.
- 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 after surgery will progress as follows:

**Day of surgery and Day 1 after surgery: clear liquids.** Some examples are breastmilk, apple juice, water, Jell-O<sup>®</sup>, Italian ice, cranberry juice, popsicles (taken off the stick), or clear broth.

**Days 2-9: full liquids.** Some examples are formula, milk, yogurt, thin cooked cereals, puddings, ice cream, creamed soups, thinned pureed foods, or Stage I baby foods.

**Day 10 to 6 weeks: soft foods.** Soft foods include mashed potatoes, cereal soaked in milk, cooked vegetables, finely ground meats, pasta, bananas, or canned fruits.

- Rinse the palate after full fluids or soft foods 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 give any hard foods, such as hard toast, potato chips, bread sticks, pretzels, or hard candy. 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. You can buy normal saline nose drops 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.

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- **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.
- Dress your child in the terrycloth and Velcro® sleeves you received for 6 weeks.
- Remove the 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 day care or school.

### **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.

### **Constipation**

- Keep track of your child's bowel habits. He or she should return to usual bowel habits. 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.

### **Follow-up**

Your child will need to return for a follow up visit in 1-2 weeks. Call your child's doctor to arrange for this.

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

Call if your child:

- has a fever over 100.5°F degrees;
- has any bleeding or drainage 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

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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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