



Patient Education:

CARING FOR YOUR BABY WITH CLEFT LIP AND PALATE

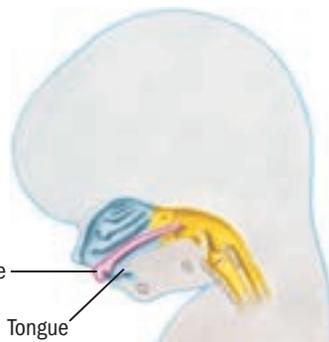
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CARING FOR YOUR BABY WITH CLEFT LIP AND PALATE



A cleft lip or palate (roof of the mouth) is the most common facial birth defect. It occurs before birth, when the parts that form the baby's face and palate don't come together.

At 8 to 10 weeks of development



Palate
Tongue

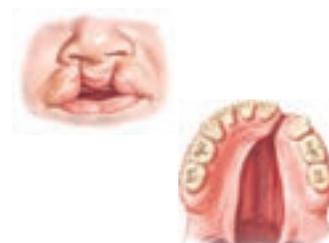
DNA



The cause of the cleft lip or palate is unknown. Sometimes, this defect runs in families (is genetic).



Cleft lips



Cleft palate

A cleft may occur on one or both sides of the upper lip and may affect the nose. A cleft palate may affect only the soft part of the palate at the back of the mouth or the bony part of the palate also.



The health care provider makes a diagnosis by examining your baby.

What Are Cleft Lip and Palate?

A cleft lip and cleft palate are facial birth defects. Cleft means an opening. These defects affect the upper lip and the roof of the mouth (palate). The parts that form the baby's face and palate don't join before birth.

A cleft lip or palate is the most common facial birth defect. Up to 5000 babies are born in the United States each year with this problem. Clefts occur more often in Asian, Latino, and Native American children.

What Causes Cleft Lip and Palate?

The cause is unknown. The defects sometimes run in families (are genetic). If either parent has a cleft lip or palate, the chance increases that the baby will also. If both parents are normal and have a baby with a cleft lip or palate, chances are higher that babies born later will have it.

What Are the Symptoms of Cleft Lip and Palate?

A cleft may occur on one side or both sides of the upper lip. The split usually affects only the lip but may extend into the nose. For a cleft palate, the soft part of the palate at the back of the mouth may be involved, or the cleft may affect the bony part of the palate (hard palate).

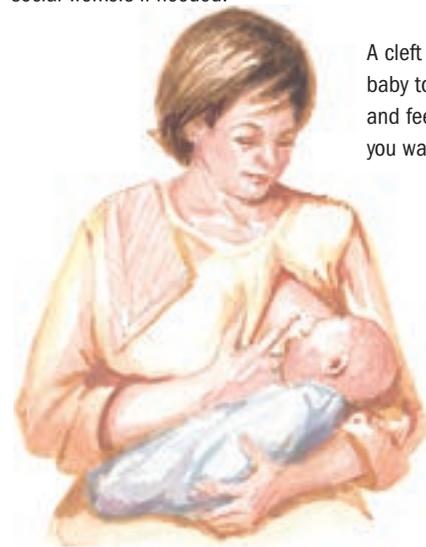
These defects can cause feeding and developmental problems, poor dental development, trouble with speech, and frequent colds, sore throats, and ear infections.

How Are Cleft Lip and Palate Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis by a physical examination. The need for more tests depends on the defect's severity.

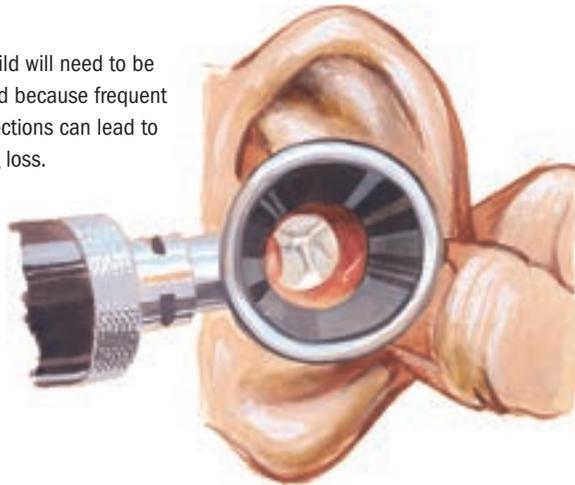


Your health care provider will refer you to a team of specialists to help evaluate your baby for problems and suggest treatment, such as surgery to correct the defect. Get help and emotional support from psychologists and social workers if needed.



A cleft can make it hard for your baby to suck and feed. A speech and feeding therapist will show you ways to feed your baby.

Your child will need to be watched because frequent ear infections can lead to hearing loss.



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How Is Cleft Lip and Palate Treated?

Surgery can improve a cleft lip or palate. Which type of surgery depends on how bad the defect is. At times the surgeon may be able to fix the baby's lip before sending the baby home. If the baby has a cleft palate, an operation may be done later.

Other treatments depend on which problems the cleft lip or palate causes. A cleft can make it hard for the baby to suck and feed. A speech and feeding therapist will describe ways to feed the baby. The cleft can cause problems in learning to speak. Care of a speech and language therapist will be needed. A cleft may cause frequent ear infections, which can lead to hearing loss.

A team of specialists can help check the baby. This team may include a surgeon who specializes in these defects, hearing specialist, dentist, orthodontist (dentist who straightens teeth), and speech-language specialist (for both speech and feeding problems). Psychologists and social workers may also be involved.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Cleft Lip and Palate:

- ✓ **DO** make sure that your child gets care from doctors who can check for problems with teeth, feeding, hearing, and speaking.
- ✓ **DO** remember that surgery can correct most defects in 12 to 18 months after birth.
- ✓ **DO** have a positive attitude and encourage your child to be positive.
- ⊘ **DON'T** avoid getting help and emotional support from psychologists if needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- Cleft Palate Foundation
Tel: (919) 933-9044, (800) 242-5338
Website: <http://www.cleftline.org>