

Cleft Care: Following palate repair

What is a cleft palate repair?

A palate repair is an operation to close the opening in the roof of your baby's mouth (palate). The palate plays an important role in feeding, speech, and keeping food and drink out of the nose. This surgery helps your baby to feed more effectively and supports the development of speech sounds as they grow.

Recovery

Healing usually takes 3 weeks. During this time, your baby may need extra comfort and reassurance. Feeding and sleep patterns are often unsettled after a hospital stay, which is normal and improves over time.

If your child is older, their speech may sound better at first because of swelling. As the swelling settles, their speech may change. It can take several months to understand how the surgery has supported speech. The Speech Pathology team will follow up after surgery to monitor progress.

Diet

For the first 3 weeks, your baby will need smooth, pureed food only. Food should be lump-free and easy to swallow. Avoid putting spoons, forks, or other objects directly into the mouth.

Examples include:

- pureed meats
- smooth porridge
- well-pureed fruit and vegetables (banana, avocado, potato)
- lump-free yoghurt, milkshakes, custard.

Your baby may prefer smaller, more frequent feeds during this time. If needed, you can add extra fluid (milk or water) to food to help maintain hydration.

Bottles

For 3 weeks, your baby can drink from:

- a Pigeon bottle with spoon attachment
- an open cup
- a spout-free sippy cup (if recommended by your team).

Do not use:

- bottles with teats
- dummies.

These can damage the repair.



Mouth care

Caring for the mouth after surgery helps prevent infection and supports healing.

- Rinse the mouth with cooled, boiled water after all feeds and medications.
- Arm splints stay on for 3 weeks to prevent hands going into the mouth.
- When removing splints under supervision, check the skin for redness or pressure marks.
- Encourage your child to keep hands and objects out of their mouth.



Pain relief

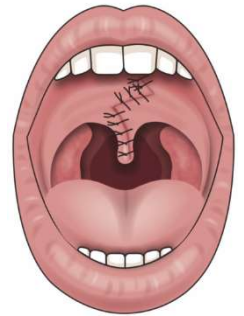
Your baby's mouth will feel different, but most babies adjust quickly.

If your baby is uncomfortable, you can give paracetamol as directed on the packaging.

Signs of infection

Please watch for:

- temperature over 38°C
- increasing swelling or redness around the mouth
- bleeding from the mouth
- a strong or unusual smell.



If you notice any of these, contact the cleft nurse on 08 6456 4380 or PCH.PlasticsCNS@health.wa.gov.au during office hours. If your child is unwell or you are concerned, see your GP or go to your nearest emergency department.

Follow-up

The cleft nurse will check on you around a week after surgery. You will receive an appointment to see the surgeon at around 3 months after surgery.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact Plastics Administration during office hours on 08 6456 4380 and your call will be directed to the appropriate person to assist you.



Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service



Child and Adolescent Health Service

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