

Cleft Care: Feeding after surgery

Cleft surgery is a big step in your baby's journey. The PCH cleft team is here to support you through this next stage.

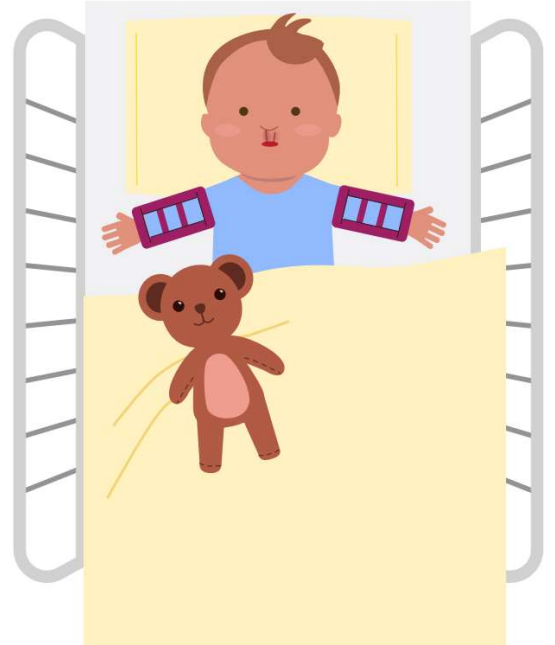
Feeding will look a little different for a short time while your baby's mouth heals. This handout explains what to expect and how to feed your baby safely and comfortably.

Lip surgery

After lip surgery, most babies return to their usual breast or bottle feeds once they are ready.

Your cleft team will:

- show you how to use the soft arm splints, which can help protect the stitches while your baby heals
- support you with feeding
- answer your questions.



Palate surgery

After palate surgery, feeding will be different for 3 weeks while the palate heals. During this time, do not put anything hard or sharp in your baby's mouth. This can damage the stitches.

This includes:

- dummies
- bottle teats or spoons
- fingers
- toys.

Safe ways to feed

For 3 weeks after palate surgery, use the bottle that your cleft team recommends.

Use:

- spoon bottles
- spoon feeding
- flat-rimmed open cups.

Do not use:

- spouts
- straws
- sippy cups.



Safe food and drinks

Offer foods that are smooth and lump-free, as well as nourishing fluids. Aim for a texture that easily drips off a spoon, like yoghurt or custard. You can mix formula or breastmilk into purees if needed to thin the texture.

Nourishing fluids:

- breastmilk
- formula
- smooth blended soups
- thin custard
- strained baby cereal.

Smooth pureed foods:

- mashed banana (well blended)
- pureed pear or apple
- plain yoghurt (no fruit pieces)
- blended mashed potato or sweet potato
- pureed lentils
- blended pasta or rice with sauce.

Feeding tips

Bring your baby's favourite soft foods to hospital. Familiar tastes can be very comforting and may help your baby start feeding again after surgery.

When feeding:

- offer small, frequent feeds
- keep feeding calm and gentle.

Remember, healing takes time. Every baby moves at their own pace.

Is my baby feeding well?

Signs your baby is **getting enough** milk and food include:

- regular wet nappies
- steady weight gain
- calm and settled after feeds.

If your baby is **not getting enough** milk and food they could become dehydrated. Seek medical help if your baby has:

- fewer wet nappies
- dry lips
- they are very sleepy
- they are hard to wake.



Watch for signs of infection

Contact the PCH cleft team, your GP, or go to Emergency if you notice:

- temperature over 38°C
- increasing redness or swelling
- bleeding or pus
- a strong smell from the wound
- your baby seems very unwell or distressed.

Cleft Care team contacts

Feeding after surgery can be tiring and challenging. Please contact your cleft team or Child Health Nurse for support early if you are worried or have any questions.

Clinical nurse specialist

Phone: (08) 6456 8132

Speech Pathology

Phone: (08) 6456 0414

Cleft administration

Phone: (08) 6456 4380

Email: PCH.PlasticsCNS@health.wa.gov.au

PCH Ward

Phone: (08) 6456 2222



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