

Cleft Care: Preparing for surgery

Cleft surgery is an important step in your baby's cleft care. Planning ahead can help the hospital stay and the first days at home run more smoothly.

This guide shares suggestions to help you prepare before surgery and set up your home for recovery.

Before surgery – planning ahead

Reduce the chance of illness

- In the week before surgery, try to lower your baby's chance of catching a cold or infection.
- If possible, reduce daycare attendance and avoid crowded places. Illness close to surgery may cause delays.

Plan ahead with food

- The days after surgery can be busy and tiring. Planning meals in advance can help. Prepare and freeze meals for your family and stock up on baby food pouches or purees.
- This can make the return home easier and give you more time to focus on your baby.

Wean the dummy

- If your baby uses a dummy, start gently reducing dummy use about one month before surgery.
- After surgery, your baby will not be able to use a dummy. Starting early can make this change easier.

Introduce new feeding tools early

- About one month before surgery, practise drinking from an open cup, or using a spoon bottle, for fluids.
- This helps your baby get used to these feeding methods before the post-surgery feeding period.

Packing for hospital

For you:

- snacks and a large water bottle
- earphones (to reduce hospital noise or listen to something calming)
- comfortable clothes and layers for overnight stays.

For your baby:

- pre-boiled water bottles and ready-to-use food pouches
- a favourite comforter or blanket
- burp cloths and bibs (feeding after surgery can be messy)
- clothing that fastens down the body (not over the head).



Setting up your home before surgery

Preparing a small care area before going to hospital can make the first few days at home easier. Keeping items in one place can be useful. You could include:

- paracetamol: as recommended for pain relief
- thermometer: to check your baby's temperature
- notebook or notes app: to record medication times, feeds and changes
- feeding equipment: spoons, cups and bibs
- baby carrier: helpful for babies who settle when held close.

Feeding after surgery

For more information on feeding, please refer to our [Cleft Care: Feeding After Surgery](#) resource for detailed guidance on feeding during recovery.

Looking out for yourself

You may spend long periods holding your baby while they sleep. Keep snacks, water, and entertainment nearby. Recovery can be tiring. Take things one day at a time and rest when you can.

Remember: Every child's recovery is different. If you have concerns or questions at any stage, contact your cleft team for advice.

Cleft Care team contacts

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the cleft team for support.

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



Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service



Child and Adolescent Health Service

15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009.

Telephone: (08) 6456 2222

Produced by: Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

Ref: 1969 © CAHS March 2026

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for people with disability.

Disclaimer: This publication is for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for medical advice.

© State of Western Australia, Child and Adolescent Health Service.

