

Guide for Feeding Your Baby with a Cleft Lip and/or Palate



Cleft Palate and Craniofacial Program

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver
BC, V6H 3V4

www.bcchildrens.ca

Find more resources at:

<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/clinics/cleft-palate-craniofacial-disorders>

Congratulations on the birth of your baby!

Feeding a newborn baby is one of the first acts of love and care parents do for their new baby. It is common for parents to worry about how the cleft of the lip and/or palate will affect your baby's ability to feed – breastfeeding in particular. No matter what your feeding choice is, we hope this information pamphlet will help answer some of the common questions that you may have about feeding your baby.

Will breast or bottle feeding hurt my baby?

No. The cleft is not an open wound. The cleft is a natural part of how your baby was formed.

Can I breastfeed if my baby has a cleft lip?

Yes, your baby should be able to breastfeed. The key is getting your baby and breast into the right position that lets your baby latch onto the nipple and suck effectively. You may use your hand and the breast to “seal off” the cleft. You may also help close the cleft with tape that will not hurt the baby's skin... This is a special hypoallergenic tape which means it is sensitive to your baby's skin.

Can I breastfeed if my baby has a cleft palate?

Most babies with cleft palate have difficulty breast-feeding. How difficult it will be depends on the type of cleft palate. Many babies with a cleft palate will not be able to breastfeed because they will not be able to create the suction they need to draw the milk from the breast.

If your baby cannot create good suction then he or she will need to have their milk (either breast milk or formula) put in a special bottle for feeding. The important thing to remember is that your baby will be able to feed using this bottle!

What if the cleft is just in the gum?

Your baby *may* be able to breastfeed if:

- He or she has a cleft in the hard palate (the part of the palate that the tip of your tongue can touch) and if;
- The soft palate (the soft portion just before the throat) is fine.

You will have to try different positions at the breast. You may need extra time to get feeding started while you and baby learn together how to seal the cleft of the lip with your breast tissue or fingers. Be patient, you and your baby will learn together!

What if the cleft is in the back of the palate?

If your baby has a cleft of the soft palate (the soft portion just before the throat), breastfeeding will most likely not be possible. The cleft will prevent your baby from sealing off the mouth from the nose during feeding to create suction. The cleft will make your baby's suction weak and ineffective for successful breastfeeding. If baby is left only to nurse at the breast, their weak suction will not give the right signal to your body to produce enough breast milk and your baby will not get enough food.

How do I feed my baby who has a cleft of the soft palate?

You will offer your baby breast milk or formula using a special feeding system, the Dr Browns Specialty Feeding set. This bottle has a one-way valve in it that allows the milk to flow into your baby's mouth without them having to use suction. This bottle will help your baby get the milk they need without becoming tired during feeding. This bottle is very easy to use and your baby will learn very quickly.

Should I feed my baby breast milk or formula?

Breast milk and infant formula will both keep your baby well-fed and satisfied after feeds. If you are planning on breast-feeding your baby, having a double sided breast pump on hand and pumping while bottle feeding your baby can be helpful to increase your milk supply. Pumping regularly is especially important in the first two weeks after delivery.

How do I express my breast milk?

If you have decided to give your baby breast milk, you should begin to pump to express breast milk as soon after birth as possible. It is important to put your baby to your breast for suckling as a comfort and to help get your milk supply established. We suggest you encourage baby to suckle no longer than 5-10 minutes as part of each feeding. Longer than this will tire baby too much and they will be too tired to take the rest of the feeding from the special bottle. You should continue to pump your breasts as often as you feed your baby (at least every 3 hours) to help maintain a good supply of breastmilk.

Most maternity units have electric breast pumps available for your use. The nurse at the hospital will show you how to pump your breasts effectively. You may also choose to see a lactation consultant if one is available. If you've been discharged from the hospital and would like to see a lactation consultant, contact our nursing team who can connect you with one. Lactation consultants will help and guide you in getting your milk production established.

For Questions/Concerns, please contact:

Cleft Palate Program: 604-875-3146

Nurse Clinician: 604-875-2345 local 7057

Toll Free: 1-888-300-3088
