



# Cleft Palate Repair Information for Parent and Carers

Cleft Lip and Palate Service  
01 878 4882

Main Hospital Number  
01 878 4200

Your baby has been listed for a cleft palate repair. You should have already met with your child's Consultant Plastic Surgeon and the Cleft Team to discuss the surgery.

We understand that any hospital admission is an anxious time for parents. We have put together some questions, which parents often ask and hope that you will find the answers useful.

## Will I be able to stay with my baby?

Parents are very welcome and encouraged to stay with their child in Temple Street Children's University Hospital. The facilities for staying with your baby overnight may vary from an armchair/mattress at their cot side or a room in parent accommodation.



Parent accommodation beds are subject to availability with first preference given to families living outside the Dublin area or parents of critically ill children. You may contact the **Parents Accommodation Office on 018784300** before your baby's admission to request accommodation or discuss your options with the Ward Nurse Manager when you arrive.

It is our policy that every child in the hospital should have the continuous support of their family when possible. The welfare of your baby must always be taken into consideration and at certain times visiting restrictions may be put in place. Visiting is unrestricted for parents or guardians. However, only one person can stay overnight by their baby's side.

Visiting times 10 am - 8 pm unless local restrictions are in place.

## **Is there anything that I should do before the operation?**

If possible, please keep your baby away from other children or adults who have colds or infections. This will reduce the chance of their operation being cancelled because they are unwell.

Your baby should not receive any of their routine immunisations in the 72 hours before their surgery.

If your baby is in any way unwell before you bring them to hospital, please telephone one of the following as soon as possible;

- Bed Manager or admissions office on 018784275
- Cleft Clinical Coordinator on 01 8784882 / 087 9888725
- Plastics Registrar via the hospital switch on 018974200

## **What happens if my baby's surgery date is cancelled?**

If your baby's surgery has been cancelled for one of a number of reasons, a member of the Cleft Team will advise you of a new date for their operation.

## Mittens



The use of hand mittens is advised for 3 weeks after your baby's palate repair. We ask that you buy several pairs of cotton hand mittens or white children's cotton socks to cover their hands 24 hours a day after surgery. This prevents fingers from damaging the repaired palate. This is of particular importance if your baby is a finger sucker.

The use of soothers or pacifiers should be avoided for 3 weeks following surgery. If one is absolutely needed to settle your baby use for a short time only.



A soother should be sterilised each time before use.

Please bring your baby's usual feeding bottle or cup feeder with you.

Your baby will be offered drinks of their usual milk immediately after surgery, and later after each spoon feed to cleanse their palate. It is a good idea to get your baby accustomed to the taste of water well in advance of surgery.

Your baby will be positioned sleeping on their side with their head slightly elevated after surgery. This will help with their breathing as some swelling inside their mouth is expected. You will be advised on their sleeping position before discharge home.

## What happens before the operation?

Your baby will have a pre-operative assessment before surgery. This will include a

- Medical check
- Blood test - if required
- Clinical photographs

If your baby has any medical problems, such as allergies, please tell the doctors and nurses. If your baby is taking any prescribed medicines, please bring these with you. You will also be asked to sign a consent form giving permission for their surgery.

This pre-operative assessment is performed before your child is admitted for surgery. Recent changes to the admission policy may mean that your baby is admitted to hospital on the morning of surgery and will be admitted to the ward area before the operation. Your baby will need to be fasting before going to theatre. The consultant or cleft nose specialist will confirm the exact fasting times before theatre.

Your baby's nurse will show you around the ward and ask you some questions about their past health and daily routine. You can then discuss with the nurse how you will be involved in your baby's care before and after their operation.

The anaesthetist may also visit you to explain about the anaesthetic in more detail.



## What anaesthetic is used?

Your baby will be given a general anaesthetic, this usually involves your child breathing in an anaesthetic gas through a special mask until they are asleep. Usually you can accompany your baby to theatre and stay until they are asleep.

## How long will the operation take and what happens after the operation?

The length of the operation will depend on the type of cleft your baby has. The operation usually takes around an hour but your baby will be away from the ward for longer than this as some time is spent in the anaesthetic and recovery areas. An average stay of 2 - 3 hours in the theatre suite is to be expected. One of the nurses from the ward will accompany your baby back from the recovery room as soon as they have woken up and recovered from the anaesthetic.

Immediately after their operation, some babies may need a short stay in the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). This is to allow for closer observation and monitoring. Should this occur you will be advised of this by the nurse/ plastics team and brought to the PICU to see your baby as soon as possible.

Your baby's oxygen levels will be monitored overnight with a machine called an oxygen saturation monitor. This does not hurt in any way. A lead from the monitor is attached to your baby's foot with a sticky tape called Elastoplast.



## Will my baby have pain?

During the operation your child will have received some local anaesthetic in their palate as well as pain medication.

If your baby is upset when they return to the ward it will probably be because they are hungry and will settle with a feed and a cuddle.

There may be a little blood around your baby's mouth and nose, particularly if they are crying. This usually stops when they settle.

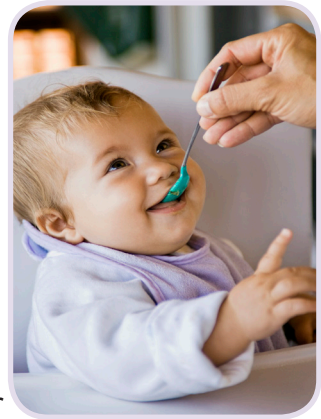
The nurses on the ward will give your child pain medication regularly to keep them comfortable.



## When can my baby feed?

We are happy for your baby to drink their usual milk as soon as they have returned to the ward.

Spoon feeds of a sloppy or yoghurt consistency can be started on the evening of surgery. Food of this consistency is advised for two weeks following surgery.



Some babies find taking milk from their bottle uncomfortable for a couple of days. You may find that your baby prefers to take their milk from a feeder cup or mixed in with their semi-solid foods during this time.

We advise offering your baby a drink of water after spoon feeds to cleanse their palate of food. Your baby's specialised bottle may be needed for several weeks after surgery until such time as the palate is well healed and the palate muscles stronger.

## When can we go home?

Every baby is different, but most babies go home 24 to 48 hours after surgery. This will depend upon your baby's feeding pattern and their general condition. Sometimes your child's doctors may prescribe antibiotics for 5-7 days after the operation.

Your baby's routine will have been different to your usual routine while they were in hospital. They may be a little unsettled after you go home, but should get back to their usual routine after a few days.



## **What care will the stitches need?**

Your baby should be given cooled boiled water after every feed to keep the stitches in the palate clean. This should be continued at home for about 3 weeks.

Care must be taken that nothing hard should be put into your baby's mouth for at least 3 weeks. We also advise that you use mittens or cotton socks on your baby's hands both day and night during this period.

Your baby should not be given any hard toys to play with, either in hospital or at home, again for at least 3 weeks, to prevent them from damaging their stitches.

Some examples of hard objects are plastic spoons, pens, and straws.

## **Will the stitches need to be taken out?**

The stitches are dissolvable and will not need to be removed. They can take up to 4 weeks to dissolve, so please don't worry if you still see stitches in your baby's palate after a few weeks.

## **Do I need to make a follow up appointment?**

The Cleft Services Manager will arrange for an appointment for your baby to see the Consultant Plastic Surgeon and the Cleft Team following surgery. This appointment will be posted out to you after your child is discharged home.

## Will my child need any further surgery on their palate?

Approximately 20% (2 in 10) of children will require further surgery on their palate when they are older to correct speech problems.

This means 80% (8 in 10) require no further palate surgery.

It is very important that your child attends every follow up appointment with the Cleft Team. This will allow for your child to be monitored throughout childhood and additional treatment to be planned if and when required.

As always, if you have any questions about what you have read, or anything to do with the operation, please telephone the Cleft Nurse on 01 8784200 bleep 116.

Further information may also be obtained from contacting the following members of the cleft or hospital teams.



Helen Tuffy	Cleft Clinical Coordinator	01 8784882 (office) 01 8784200 bleep 796
Jane Gunn	Cleft Lip and Palate Nurse Specialist	01 8921797 (office) 01 8784200 bleep 116
Linda Comey	Cleft and Craniofacial Administrative Manager	01 8784883  cleft@cuh.ie
Lorraine McKnight	Cleft Secretary	01 8784882
Plastics Registrar	Plastic Surgery Doctor on Duty	01 8784200
St Frances Clinic	Cleft Speech and Language Therapists	01 8784872
Admissions Office		01 8784275
Parent Accommodation		01 8784300
Main Hospital		01 8784200 www.cuh.ie

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The information contained in this leaflet is correct at time of print