

# Cleft Palate Repair

## *Post-Operative Patient Instructions*

Dr. Albert Woo: 401-444-2299

### Feeding

Your child's palate is repaired with dissolving stitches, but the repair is delicate for six weeks after surgery. For the repair to heal well, your child should not put anything hard in his/her mouth.

- **Try to avoid giving your child a pacifier or bottle. This may damage the stitches.**
- Give your child soft foods for the first 3 weeks, using a cup or spoon. Use the side of the spoon only and do not insert past the lips. Use a sippy cup that pours easily and has a short spout that does not touch the palate. Bring the cup your child uses at home to the hospital so the team can evaluate it.
- Offer small amounts of **cool liquids** every 1 to 2 hours when your child is awake. This will keep the mouth and palate moist and clean. The cool temperature also helps to sooth the swelling and inflammation from surgery.

Your child's diet after surgery will progress as follows:

- **Day of surgery and Day 1 after surgery: Liquids.** Some examples are formula, milk, yogurt, thin cooked cereals, puddings, ice cream, creamed soups, and thinned pureed foods, or Stage I baby foods.
- **For the next 3 weeks: Soft foods.** Examples include mashed potatoes, cereal soaked in milk, cooked vegetables, finely ground meats, pasta, bananas, or canned fruits. A general rule is that **the food item should be easily smashed between 2 fingers.**
- After thick fluids or soft foods, rinse the palate with water using a cup or syringe for 4 weeks (be sure not to touch the palate with the syringe). The palate should be rinsed at least 4 times per day.
- **Do not feed hard foods**, such as hard toast, potato chips, bread sticks, pretzels, or hard candy. Hard foods could damage the stitches.

## Cleaning the Nose

- Sometimes your child's nose may get stuffy. This may make it difficult for your child to eat. You can try **saline nose drops** found in any pharmacy. If the drops don't clear your child's nose, gently use a nasal aspirator or bulb syringe to clean the nose.
- Liquid may drip from your child's nose after eating. This can occur for several months after surgery and is not unusual. You may need to clear his/her nose with the bulb suction.

## Activity

- Your child may play gently. He or she may enjoy being read to, playing with toys, and going for stroller walks.
- **Watch your child closely. Nothing should be put in his or her mouth while it heals.** The palate is not fully healed until about 6 weeks after the operation.
- At the end of the surgery special Velcro® sleeves may have been placed on your child's arms to prevent him/her from picking at the lip. These are completely optional and were placed for your convenience. You may use them as you see fit. Some parents place them at night when they are not watching their child to prevent injury.
- If used, remove the sleeves several times a day to exercise your child's arms. Take off one sleeve off at a time, so that your child will not be able to touch the lip.
- Your child's doctor will tell you when your child can return to daycare or school. This is usually about a week after surgery.

## Pain Control

- Your child may have some mild discomfort at home. If your infant is irritable and not feeding well, he/she may be in pain. Give **acetaminophen (Tylenol)**, as directed by your doctor. It is used to relieve mild to moderate pain and to reduce fever. Be sure to follow the instructions of your doctor to ensure proper dosing.
- If your child has more than mild discomfort, the doctor may prescribe additional medicine to ease the pain. Give pain medicine as prescribed and instructed by your doctor.
- Try to schedule a dose of pain medicine around bedtime, especially for the first few days at home. This may help your child sleep better.

- Keep track of your child's bowel habits. You should see a return to usual bowel habits within a week of surgery. If your child does not have a bowel movement every day, he or she may be constipated. Call your child's doctor or nurse if you think your child is constipated.

### **Emotional Recovery**

- After a cleft palate repair, your child may be tired or irritable. Healing for each child is different.
- It is important for your child to rest. In time, your child will return to his or her usual activities.
- Sleep disturbances are common the first few weeks.

### **Follow-up**

- Your child will need to return for a follow up visit in 3 weeks. **Call Dr. Woo's office at (401) 444-2299 to arrange the appointment.**

### **When to Call Your Child's Doctor**

Call if your child:

- Has a fever over 101.5°F degrees;
- Has bleeding from the mouth;
- Has foul smelling odor or drainage;
- Has pain that doesn't go away after giving medicine for pain; or
- Vomits or is not drinking liquids.