

Cleft Lip and Nose Repair: Care After Surgery

How will surgery affect my child and family?

For a week or two after surgery, your child may need extra attention and understanding. Don't worry about "spoiling" your child during this time. It is OK to respond to your child's need for extra holding and comforting.

What can I expect after surgery?

After surgery, your child will be sleepy for several hours. He will have an IV in place for giving fluids and pain medicines. He will be wearing long, cloth-sleeve arm restraints. Some children will have soft plastic tubes called stents in the nose. These stents maintain the shape of the nose while it heals. The lip and nose will be swollen. You may see a little bloody drainage around the lips and nose. You will see stitches on the lip and under the nose, and they will be covered in ointment.

How will my child eat?

When your child awakes, you can give clear liquids or breast milk using whatever bottle you normally use. If she tolerates this well, she can go on to her usual formula. Breast-fed babies can have breast milk by bottle or can nurse right away. Most babies will eat fairly well after surgery, but a few will refuse to take the bottle or breast. The nurses will help you find a way to feed your baby. This may include giving pain medicine just before feedings, and possibly using

a syringe or squeeze bottle for feedings until your baby is willing to go back to her regular bottle or breast.

What kind of care will be needed at home?

Arm restraints. Keep the arm restraints on at all times, 24 hours a day for 2 weeks. It is important to keep these on, because a baby can accidentally damage the surgical site with his hands. You can remove the arm restraints for a short time several times a day for bathing and exercise. Be sure to hold the baby's free hands during these times.

Pain relief. Both pain medicines and soothing techniques can help your baby be more comfortable. You will be given some pain medicine to give to your child by mouth at home. For the first several days after surgery, it is best to give the medicine on a regular schedule, before your child shows signs of pain. After this, if your baby is comfortable, you can switch to regular Tylenol as needed. Most prescription pain medicines can cause constipation. If this is a problem for your baby, you may give 1 to 2 ounces of pear juice each day until it gets better. An infant glycerin suppository may also be given if the baby is very uncomfortable from constipation. These can be bought over-the-counter at any pharmacy.

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Care of the lip and nose. Clean your child's lip and nose incisions with warm water and a little mild soap every day. Pat dry. Apply antibiotic ointment to the incisions 3 or 4 times a day to keep them moist and greasy. If the lip incisions get "crusty," loosen these gently with warm water and remove as often as needed.

Some children will have stitches that dissolve on their own within a week of surgery, and some will have stitches that must be removed 6 to 7 days after surgery. Your surgeon will tell you which kind your child has. If your child has stitches that need to be removed, it is important that this be done exactly 6 to 7 days after surgery. Please call for an appointment to have this done.

If your child has nasal stents, try to keep them from getting clogged with dried mucus. Your nurse will show you how to put several drops of saline in the stents to keep the nasal mucus thin. Put saline into the stents at least 4 times a day. You can use it more often if needed. This will not hurt your baby, though he may not like it. Some babies will sneeze after you put saline in the nose. This is fine — the stents are stitched in and should stay securely in place. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, the nasal stents will become blocked. As long as one side stays open, this is usually not a problem. If both sides get blocked, or if your baby has any trouble breathing or eating due to clogged stents, please call. As the nasal swelling goes down, the stents may look looser, but nothing needs to be done for this. Nasal stents usually are kept in for 2 to 4 weeks and are easily removed during a clinic visit.

When should I call the Craniofacial Center?

Call us if you have any question about your baby's care or if your baby has any of these warning signs:

- A temperature over 100.5°F or 38°C
- Increased swelling or redness of the lip or any drainage from the incisions
- Poor eating
- Pain that is not helped by the medicines
- Any difficulty with the nasal stents

How do I reach someone in the Craniofacial Center?

If you are calling Monday through-Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., call (206) 987-2208, option 4 or toll-free (866) 987-2000 ext. 2208, option 4, to reach one of the nurses.

If you need to reach someone during evening, weekend, or holiday times, please call the Children's Hospital operator at (206) 987-2000 or toll-free (866) 987-2000 and ask for the plastic surgery provider on call.

TO LEARN MORE

- **Craniofacial Center (206) 987-2208**
- **Your Child's Health-Care Provider**

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call the Family Resource Center at (206) 987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health-care provider.