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?
Your child will have an IV in place for giving fluids and pain medicines. 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 wakes up, you can offer a feeding using whatever bottle or cup you normally use. Breast-fed babies can nurse right away. Most children will eat fairly well after surgery, but a few will refuse feedings at first. The nurses will help you find a way to feed your child. This may include giving pain medicine just before feedings, and possibly using a syringe or squeeze bottle for feedings until your child is willing to go back to their usual feeding method. Older children can eat their normal diets, but should start with softer foods at first.

Will my child have pain?
Your child may have some pain and discomfort after surgery. Pain medicine and soothing techniques can help your child be more comfortable. For information about soothing techniques, read the Seattle Children’s flyer “Acute Pain: Pain relief for a surgery or medical procedure.” You will be given some pain medicine to give to your child by mouth at home. Preventing pain, and relieving pain early, will make your child more comfortable, allow for better feeding, and promote healing. Also, treating pain early leads to less use of pain medicines overall.

Some 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, if your baby’s healthcare provider says it is OK.

Talk with your healthcare provider about using an infant glycerin suppository if your baby is very uncomfortable from constipation. These can be bought over the counter at any pharmacy. Check with your healthcare provider first before giving any type of medicine to your child.
How do I care for my child’s lip and nose at home?

Your child’s lip incision has been closed in layers, so it should not be harmed by normal activities of daily living. Your child does not need arm restraints or mittens. They can sleep in whatever position they normally do.

Incisions

Try to avoid letting scabs or crusts build up on your child’s incisions. Clean your child’s lip and nose incisions with warm water and a little mild soap every day. Pat dry. Apply petroleum jelly to the incisions 3 or 4 times a day to keep them moist and greasy. Wipe or wash away the old petroleum jelly before applying a new layer. If the lip incisions get “crusty,” loosen the crusts gently with warm water and remove them as often as needed. You can use peroxide diluted with water if there is dried blood that is hard to remove.

Your child will not hurt the incision by touching it or putting their fingers in their mouths. They can breastfeed or use their usual bottle or cup. Your baby should avoid regular use of a pacifier because the outside rim (flange) can press against the lip.

Older children should not participate in sports or gym class for several weeks. They should also avoid playgrounds, ball games and anything with wheels (bikes, scooters, skates).

Stitches

Your surgeon will tell you if your child’s stitches will dissolve on their own, or if they need to be removed about one week after surgery. You should have an appointment to have the stitches removed before you leave the hospital.

Nasal stents

If your child has nasal stents, try to keep them from getting clogged with dried mucus or blood. Your nurse will show you how to put saline drops or spray in the stents to keep the nasal stents clear. Put saline into the stents at least 4 times a day. They are less likely to clog the more often you do this. You can use it more often if needed. This will not hurt your child, though they may not like it. Some children 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 are usually kept in for at least a week, and sometimes much longer. They are easily removed during a clinic visit.

Taking care of the scar

Keeping your child’s incisions clean is the only thing than you need to do in the first week or 2 after surgery. Once the incisions are healed, we will advise you about how to care for the scars. This may include the use of sunscreen,
massage, or products to put on the scar. We will talk more about this at your child’s clinic visit after surgery.

**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 101.5°F or 38.5°C
- Increased swelling or redness of the lip or any drainage from the incisions
- Poor feeding
- 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 206-987-1117 or toll-free 866-987-2000 ext. 1117 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.

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**Free Interpreter Services**

- In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.