

Cleft Palate: Feeding Your Baby

The palate, or the roof of the mouth, is made of bones and soft tissue. The palate separates the mouth from the nose. A cleft palate is an opening in the bones and soft tissue. This open space in the palate makes it hard for your baby to suck from a bottle or breast. Here are some ways to help your baby feed.

Supplies for Feeding Your Baby

Feeding a baby with a cleft of the palate may not be easy at first. Most babies with a cleft of the palate may not be able to breast feed. They are not able to create the suction needed to express the milk from the breast. You can pump breast milk and put it in a bottle when your baby is not able to breast feed. You can still place your baby at the breast for non-nutritive sucking, which can be satisfying to both you and the baby.

Several types of nipples and feeders can help you feed your baby. You may need to try more than one kind of bottle and one kind of nipple before finding the best one for your baby. The nurses will work with you until you are comfortable feeding your baby. Feedings will become easier as your baby grows.

Examples of Feeding Systems

- The Mead-Johnson cleft lip/palate nurser: This bottle is soft. Any nipple can go on this bottle. You may prefer to use an orthodontic nipple (NUK). Squeeze it gently using a pulsing rhythm while the baby is sucking to help your baby drink (Picture 1).
- SpecialNeeds Feeder®, also known as the Haberman Feeder™: This nipple has three flow rates: slow, medium and fast. It fits a regular bottle. It has a one way chamber to adjust the flow rate. Gently squeeze the nipple to help your baby suck (Picture 2).



Picture 1 Mead Johnson Cleft Palate Nurser with NUK nipple



Picture 2 Haberman Feeder

Examples of feeding systems, continued

- Pigeon Nipple: The Pigeon Nipple fits on any bottle. The nipple has a soft side and a hard side (Picture 3). The hard side faces up and the soft side sits on the baby's tongue. There is a notch (air vent) in the nipple that points up toward the nose during feeding. The baby munches to get the fluid out of the bottle.



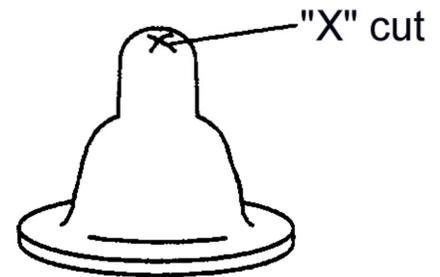
Picture 3 Pigeon Nipple

You may need to cut a larger hole in some nipples using the cross-cut method. This helps the milk flow and keeps your baby from getting too tired during feeding (Picture 4).

How to Feed Your Baby

Here are some tips for feeding:

- Cuddle for a few minutes before starting to feed. This will help you both relax and make feeding time more pleasant.
- Hold your baby in an upright position on your lap, tilted back just slightly (Picture 5). This helps him or her swallow. It will also help keep the milk or formula from flowing into the baby's nose or middle ear.
- Rub the nipple of the bottle on his lower lip to get the nipple into his mouth. This starts the sucking reflex.
- Burp your baby often (after every 1/2 to 1 ounce) since he may swallow air during feeding.
- Try to finish the feeding in 30 minutes so he does not get too tired.
- You may give a pacifier to your baby. Remember, he may have trouble holding it in his mouth.



Picture 4 A cross-cut nipple.

If you put baby to bed after the feeding, place him on his back or side. You may also raise the head of the crib about 6 inches if the baby spits up when he burps. This helps keep the formula in the stomach. It also helps to keep formula from flowing into the middle ear.



Picture 5 Hold your baby upright when feeding.

As your baby gets older, he will need more than formula.

Be sure to ask the doctor when you can give cereal, fruits and vegetables to your baby. Also ask about teething biscuits and finger foods.

Mouth Care

After each feeding:

- Give your baby one half ounce of water to rinse his mouth.
- Gently clean the nostrils with a twisted piece of cotton if needed.

Other Advice

A baby with a cleft palate is more likely to get ear infections. Watch for these signs of infection:

- Fever
- Fussiness
- Turning head side to side
- Breathing faster than usual
- Pulling at ears
- No desire to suck

When Will My Baby Have Surgery

Your child will have surgery to repair the cleft palate when he is about one year old. Talk to the doctor about surgery.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor if your baby:

- Is not gaining weight.
- Has a lot of gas or discomfort.
- Often spits up.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse, or call 614-722-6299.

You can find more information about feeding on the web site of the Cleft Palate Foundation: www.Cleftline.org.