

CLEFT LIP

What is a cleft lip?

A cleft is an opening or gap in the lip, and sometimes the gum. The cleft can be on one side or both sides. A cleft lip can extend into the nose or stop at any point below.

Having a cleft lip of any type also changes the shape of the nostril. When there is a cleft through the gum, certain teeth may be affected. Sometimes there is a missing tooth or an extra tooth near the cleft, and most children will need braces later.



Cleft lip occurs during the first trimester of pregnancy, often before a woman knows she is pregnant. It is one of the most common birth differences in the USA.

What causes cleft lip?

In about two thirds of children, there is no known cause for their cleft. Sometimes, clefts may run in families, or may be associated with other problems and may be part of a **syndrome**. A syndrome is a disorder that has a recognized group of symptoms or features. We have learned there are many things that can increase the chances of a baby having a cleft, but more still needs to be learned through scientific research.

Is feeding difficult for babies with cleft lip?

Babies with cleft lip should not have any problems with feeding, whether bottle feeding or breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is especially helpful for babies with cleft lips. You may need to try different positions to determine which is easiest for your baby to nurse. A lactation consultant may be helpful.

A baby with a cleft may also swallow more air while feeding. Burping your baby more frequently ensures the baby is comfortable.

Do you recommend the use of orthopedic devices for babies with cleft lips?

At our Center, every child has an individualized treatment plan developed with the family. We do not routinely recommend the use of orthopedic devices, such as Latham appliances or naso-alveolar molding (NAM). These devices are expensive, labor intensive for families, and have not been proven to have a long term benefit to children. Sometimes we recommend gentle taping of the lip at our first evaluation after the baby is born. If it will benefit your baby, we will give you the tape and teach you how to apply it.

How is cleft lip treated?

Our team recommends that every baby with cleft lip be evaluated while in the hospital, or as soon as possible after going home. A two week follow up appointment will be scheduled by our clinic coordinator. We encourage families to call us with **any** questions or concerns.

A baby born with cleft lip will need surgery to correct this condition. Our center recommends lip repair around 10 weeks of age. We repair the baby's nose at the same time. A special closure technique is used so there are no stitches that will need to come out. Our babies feed the same way before and after the operation, so you will not have to make any changes in your baby's feeding. We do not use any arm restraints ("No-No's), or protective facial appliances. Because the risks from anesthesia are much lower in 10 week old babies, babies are discharged the same day as the surgery and do not need to spend the night in the hospital.

Taking care of a child with a cleft lip is more than just performing a surgical procedure. Having a cleft lip can affect a child's appearance, self esteem, teeth, and speech. This is why all children with a cleft lip are followed regularly by our multidisciplinary team. Experts dedicated to the care of children with craniofacial conditions from a wide range of pediatric specialties work together to make sure your child gets the best care possible.

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