

Your child's cleft palate surgery

This leaflet is about your child's cleft palate surgery. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

About your child's surgery

Why does my child need a cleft palate repair?

Your child is having this operation to repair their palate. We usually do the operation when children are 9 to 12 months of age. However, there are some children that need to wait until they are a little older.

Before your child's surgery

What should I do to prepare for my child's surgery?

To reduce the chance of your child becoming unwell and the surgery being cancelled, minimise contact with other children and avoid busy public places, such as baby groups and classes, for 2 weeks before and after surgery. Avoid contact with anyone who is unwell. We advise that your child does not have any routine immunisations in the 2 weeks before and after surgery. If your child is unwell in the 2 weeks before your surgery date, please contact a member of the cleft nursing team.

What happens before my child's surgery?

We need to see your child at a pre-admission clinic to make sure they are ready for surgery. This may take place face to face, or online. You might also have an appointment with an anaesthetist.

A member of the cleft nurse team will contact you in the week before surgery. They will check that your child is fit and well for surgery. We also explain when your child should stop eating and drinking (fast) before the surgery. For full details about fasting, see our leaflet about **Your child's general anaesthetic**. Ask us for a copy if you do not have one. You can ask the cleft nurse specialist any questions you may have.

What do I need to bring on the day of surgery?

Please see a list of items that may be useful for you to bring to hospital:

- baby bottles and teats
- beaker and feeding cups (if used)
- formula milk (if used)
- nappies and wipes
- baby grows with mittens, or socks to cover hands, if needed
- soft Muslin cloths
- towel
- a favourite toy or blanket
- pushchair and car seat

- breast pump or kit if needed
- overnight bag for person staying including sleepwear and toiletries, and a sweater. During summer the ward can be hot, so lighter clothes may be useful

There is a kitchen on the ward, with access to a fridge and microwave. Please feel free to bring in meals and snacks for yourselves, labelled with your name on. There are cafés and restaurants within the hospital grounds.

On the day of your child's surgery

What happens on the day of surgery?

You will usually be asked to come to Evelina London Children's Hospital at 7:30 or 11:30am on the day of the surgery, depending on your child's place on the theatre list.

A member of the ward nursing team will prepare your child for surgery, and check their blood pressure, pulse and temperature (these are known as observations). A member of the surgical and anaesthetic team will also meet with you before the surgery. We confirm that you have given your permission (consent) for the procedure. You can ask us any questions that you may have.

You will be able to go with your child into the anaesthetic room and stay with them until they fall asleep. Your child will generally be away from you for about 3 to 5 hours.

Are there any risks?

As with all procedures, there are some risks. We talk to you about these risks when you sign the consent form.

There is a small risk of infection after the surgery. Your child will be given antibiotics during surgery to reduce this risk. No routine antibiotics will be given to take home.

Every anaesthetic carries a risk of complication. However, this is very small and is reduced further by making sure that your child is well at the time of surgery. If your child is unwell, then your child's surgery may be postponed until they are better.

If your child is unwell in the 2 weeks before surgery, please contact a member of the cleft nursing team.

After surgery there is a small risk of bleeding. You may notice blood stained mucous or saliva coming from your child's nose or mouth. This is common in the first few days after the operation but should settle.

If you see bright red bleeding that does not stop within 10 minutes please go to your nearest emergency department (A&E).

After your child's surgery

When can I see my child after the surgery?

As soon as your child wakes up from the surgery and their condition is stable, you will be taken to the recovery unit to see them.

How will my child feed after the surgery?

Your child can feed straight away orally (by mouth). If your child feeds from a bottle or cup please bring it to the recovery unit with you. If your child is bottle fed, please be aware that they might find it uncomfortable to drink from the bottle at first, so you may want to offer a cup as an alternative. We suggest you give your child some soft food (see suggested food list at the end of this leaflet).

Will my child be in pain after the surgery?

The local anaesthetic given during the surgery will make your child's palate feel numb for a few hours, but will wear off overnight. Your child will need a morphine drip during and after the operation. This is usually stopped the morning after surgery. Your child will also be given regular paracetamol and ibuprofen while in hospital, and to take home.

How long will my child need to stay in hospital?

You can usually expect to stay in hospital for up to 2 nights after your child's surgery.

Only 1 parent can stay at the bedside overnight. Please refer to Paediatric ward visiting times for other visitors.

When can my child go home?

The morning after your child's surgery they will be reviewed by a member of the cleft team. To be discharged, your child will need to be eating and drinking about half of their normal intake, and their observations need to be within normal limits for their age. Your child will need to have not needed morphine for 6 hours, and their pain should be well managed with paracetamol and ibuprofen.

After you go home

How do I care for my child's palate after the surgery?

Encourage your child to drink plenty of water after any milk or food to keep the stitches clean. Discourage your child from putting their fingers and thumb in their mouth. You may want to try dressing your baby in a baby grow with attached mittens, or try putting a small pair of socks on their hands. We recommend removing any hard toys your child may put in their mouth. If possible, avoid giving your child a dummy after surgery. If your child uses a dummy regularly, please let your named cleft nurse specialist know before your child's surgery date.

When should I start brushing my child's teeth after the operation?

Keeping up good oral hygiene after surgery is very important. We recommend you start brushing your child's teeth again by the next day, 2 times a day. Use a toothpaste that contains 1450ppm of fluoride. You may want to use a softer toothbrush.

How will I manage my child's pain after the operation?

We recommend giving your child paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly, as prescribed, for 4 to 5 days after the operation. It is important to give these medicines regularly to help to reduce pain.

After 4 to 5 days, if you feel their pain is being well managed, and they seem comfortable when eating and drinking, try to give pain relief less often, and only as needed. Aim to only give one of the medicines (either paracetamol or ibuprofen) throughout the day, and eventually stop the medicines about a week after surgery. If you have any questions about pain relief, please contact your cleft nurse.

You can give your child:

- Paracetamol: 1 recommended dose every **4 to 6 hours** as instructed
- Ibuprofen: 1 recommended dose every **6 to 8 hours** as instructed

Check with nursing staff what time the last doses were given on the ward, so you know when you can give it when you get home. You might also like to keep a diary of when you have given doses and when the next dose is due.

How will I know if my child has an infection after the surgery?

Symptoms of an infection include:

- a high temperature (fever)
- smelly, or bad breath
- redness or oozing at the wound
- changes in your child's behaviour

If your child has any of these symptoms, contact your GP or out-of-hours urgent care service, or go to your nearest emergency department (A&E).

If you look in your child's mouth and are concerned about what you see, please contact the nursing team.

When will I be seen after the surgery?

Your cleft nurse will arrange an appointment for the week after the surgery. This may be face to face or online. At this appointment, your cleft nurse will discuss your child's recovery and check their palate. You will receive another appointment to see your cleft surgeon in clinic 6 to 8 weeks after the operation.

Eating and drinking after surgery

Do not give any hard, sharp, chewy, crunchy or sticky foods for at least 2 weeks after your child's surgery. This includes pizza, chips, potato waffles, toast, crisps, biscuits and anything with pips or seeds.

Please give only soft, mashed foods during this period. Do not give bread, cake, or pastries, as these can get caught in your child's stitches, so should be avoided.

Foods that are suitable after surgery

Breakfast

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• porridge• yoghurt• milkshakes• cereal that is softened or soaked in milk• fromage frais• fruit or vegetable purees• smoothies (no pips)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• fruit pouches,• scrambled eggs or tofu• omelettes or poached eggs• mashed avocado• mashed banana or mango• stewed fruit• steamed vegetables
---	---

Lunch and dinner

- smooth soups
- soft pasta (well cooked)
- noodles
- tinned spaghetti
- mashed potato or sweet potato with grated cheese (with added butter to increase calories)
- cauliflower cheese
- cottage cheese
- grated cheese
- soft cheese triangles
- cheese spread
- cooked vegetables that are soft or mashed (broccoli, cauliflower, carrot, courgette)
- fish pie
- flaked fish
- tender minced meat (shepherd's pie or cottage pie)
- dahl, lentil stews and soups
- steamed tofu
- hummus
- custard or egg custard
- jelly
- mousse

Make sure your child is drinking water during and after meals to help with wound healing, oral hygiene, and keeping the palate clean.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact a member of our nursing team:

Kent – Rebecca Bailey, [phone](#) 07768 474876, or Joanna Leigh, [phone](#) 07810 483923

Sussex – Jackie Matthews, [phone](#) 07970 261781

Surrey – Ruth Mirza, [phone](#) 07717 864003, or Caroline Williams, [phone](#) 07768 474667

London – Isabel Williams, [phone](#) 07717 571931, or Beverley Willshire, [phone](#) 07976 292232

Cleft nurse specialists are available from 9 am to 5pm, 7 days a week. **Text messages are not diverted**, so please call if you need advice.

Please call 111 or go to your nearest emergency department (A&E) if you have any concerns after leaving hospital.

Gassiot House Accommodation Office

If you need to arrange accommodation or have any questions about your hospital accommodation booking please contact the office directly

[phone](#) 020 7188 0276 [email](#) gstt.stthomasaccommodation@nhs.net

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, [phone](#) 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), [phone](#) 020 7188 8801 [email](#) gstt.pals-gstt@nhs.net



Leaflet number: 5026/VER3

Date published: January 2025

Review date: January 2028

© 2025 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust