

# Your child's cleft palate/cleft gum: orthodontic care

**This information will answer some of your questions about the possible orthodontic care your child might need for a cleft palate or cleft gum (alveolus). If you have any questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.**

## Orthodontic care

Orthodontics is specialist dental care for diagnosing, preventing and treating problems with the teeth and jaws. This includes conditions such as irregularly positioned or spaced teeth, or jaw disproportion (also called an abnormal jaw).

Your orthodontist will be involved in monitoring the growth and development of your child's teeth and jaws, and provide treatment when needed. They will co-ordinate taking photos, impressions and X-rays of the teeth throughout your child's development. This will help in the planning and timing of your child's treatment.

## Effects that a cleft can have on a child's teeth

A cleft that involves the palate or gum might mean that the:

- shedding of baby teeth and the arrival of the permanent teeth might be slightly later than average
- new adult teeth might be out of alignment and there can be extra, missing or misshapen teeth around the cleft. Often these are more likely to be damaged by dental decay.

## When your child might need orthodontic treatment

### Soon after birth

Occasionally the orthodontist might help to adjust the clefts involving the lip and gum to help the surgeon before surgery.

For babies, lip straps/tapes and palate plates might be used to mould the jaw to make it easier for the surgeon to close the lip or palate.

For more information please ask for a copy of our leaflet about presurgical orthopaedics for your baby's cleft lip and palate.

### Aged 7 to 11 years

Adult teeth are normally established at about 13 years of age, but the teeth start to move down through the gums well before this.

If the cleft causes a gap in the gum, there is often not enough bone, so the teeth cannot take up their position. Your child might need fixed or removable braces to prepare for gum bone grafting, to allow the adult teeth to come through as normally as possible.

### **Aged 8 to 11 years**

After bone grafts have been successful, and before your child goes to secondary school, treatment can be given to improve the position of the upper front teeth.

### **Aged 12 to 15 years**

When all the adult teeth have come through, orthodontics might be used to improve the appearance and function of your teenager's teeth, and also improve their bite.

### **Aged 17 to 20+ years**

Sometimes, one jaw can grow more than the other, and the appearance of the face and the bite can be 'out of balance'. This is seen slightly more in people with a cleft, but does happen to other people too.

If your child's bite or facial balance need to be improved by moving the jaws, we will use fixed braces to prepare the teeth for jaw surgery. This process is usually started in the late teenage years and the jaw surgery is done when they have stopped growing.

## **Costs for orthodontic care**

NHS orthodontic treatment is free for patients with cleft lip or cleft palate, although sometimes there are costs for lost or damaged appliances. Although a specialist orthodontist in a high-street practice might be able to offer you advice, remember that they may not be fully trained in cleft lip and palate care.

## **General dental advice for your child**

Caring for your child's teeth should start as soon as their baby teeth appear and should continue throughout adult life. Healthy teeth make cleft treatment more straightforward and improve its outcomes.

### **Dental routine**

- Brush your baby's teeth 2 times each day, with a baby toothbrush and toothpaste, to get them used to the sensation, and start a good routine.
- Minimise the number of sweet-tasting treats your child has. Offer only water to drink between meals. Make sure they don't have bedtime or night-time drinks (apart from water), particularly after the age of 12 months.
- Take your child with you when **you** go to the dentist for a check-up. This will help to get them used to the experience, and can help them to relax when they have to visit a dentist.
- Arrange for your child to have their own check-up by their first birthday. Your dentist will give you specific advice about their teeth and development.
- Make sure your child still visits the dentist for regular check-ups while they are wearing any type of brace. Your child will need to be very careful when brushing their teeth, to keep them healthy during this time. It will be very useful if your child uses a mouth rinse containing fluoride while wearing braces.

We can make arrangements for both general and specialist dental treatment for your child. We have a cleft specialist children's dentist who can investigate and treat any complex problems if necessary.

## Support and more information

**Cleft lip and palate association (CLAPA)** offer support for those with, and affected by, cleft lip and palate. They offer telephone support, chat room (contact with other parents), a range of information, social events and local CLAPA groups. **phone** 020 7833 4883  
**email** [info@clapa.com](mailto:info@clapa.com) **web** [www.clapa.com](http://www.clapa.com)

### Contact us

The Evelina London Cleft Service is on the 1st floor of Block C, South Wing, St Thomas' Hospital. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's orthodontic treatment, please contact us, **phone** 020 7188 1321 **email** [cleftservices@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:cleftservices@gstt.nhs.uk)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### 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  
**email** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

### 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** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk). To make a complaint contact the resolution department **phone** 020 7188 3514 **email** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch, **phone** 020 7188 8815 **email** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone** 111  
**web** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

### NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing, **web** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch, **phone** 0800 731 0319 **email** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**web** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

**Leaflet number: 2378/VER6**

Date published: October 2022

Review date: October 2025

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A list of sources is available on request