

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

The aim of this leaflet is to answer some questions you may have about the possible orthodontic care your child may need for a cleft palate or cleft alveolus (gum). If you have any questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

## What is orthodontic care?

Orthodontics is specialist dental care for diagnosing, preventing and treating problems with the teeth and jaws such as irregularly positioned or spaced teeth, or an abnormal jaw (jaw disproportion). An orthodontist is a specialist dentist who has had postgraduate training in orthodontics and our consultants are super specialist in this field.

Your orthodontist will be involved in monitoring the growth and development of your child's teeth and jaws, providing treatment at appropriate stages. 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.

## What effects can a cleft have on a child's teeth?

A cleft that involves the palate or alveolus (gum) may affect the teeth in the following ways:

- The shedding of baby teeth and the arrival of the permanent teeth may be slightly later than average.
- The new adult teeth may be out of alignment and there may be extra, missing or misshapen teeth around the cleft. Often these are susceptible to dental decay.

## When might my child need orthodontic treatment and why?

### Soon after birth

- Occasionally the orthodontist may help to adjust the clefts involving the lip and alveolus to help the surgeon before surgery.
- For babies, lip straps/tapes and palate plates may be used to mould the jaw to simplify the surgeon's job in closing the lip/palate.
- For more information please ask for a copy of the leaflet **Presurgical orthopaedics for your baby's cleft lip and palate**.

### Aged 7-11 years

- Your child may need fixed or removable braces to prepare for alveolar (gum) bone grafting to allow the adult teeth to come through as normally as possible.
- Adult teeth are normally established at around 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.

### **Aged 8-11 years**

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

### **Aged 12-15 years**

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

### **Aged 17-20+ years**

- Occasionally the balance of the face may not be as we'd like: 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 needs 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 operation takes place once growth is completed.

## **Will my child's orthodontic care cost anything?**

No. NHS orthodontic treatment is free for patients with cleft lip and/or palate, although occasionally there may be costs for lost or damaged appliances. Our team, based at Guy's and St Thomas' and working across London and the South East, is highly specialised, so please come to us for advice and treatment. Although a specialist orthodontist in a high-street practice may 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 be started as soon as their baby teeth appear and should continue into adult life. Healthy teeth make cleft treatment more straightforward and improve its outcomes.

- Brush your baby's teeth twice daily 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. Ensure 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, as this will help to get them used to the experience and can help them to relax if they ever need treatment.
- Arrange for your child to have their own check-up by their first birthday. Your dentist will give you specific advice in relation to their teeth and development.
- We have a cleft specialist children's dentist who can investigate and treat any more complex problems if necessary.
- 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.

## Who can I contact for further information?

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

### Contact us

The South Thames Cleft Service is based on the first 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, **t:** 020 7188 1321, **e:** [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 **w:** [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. **t:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm  
**e:** [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). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** [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. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

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

### NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** [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.

**t:** 0800 731 0319 **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk) **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

**Leaflet number: 2378/VER5**

Date published: August 2019

Review date: August 2022

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A list of sources is available on request