

Preparing for your child's palate surgery

Anticipating your child's upcoming surgery can be very stressful for parents. You may find that you have a lot of questions about what will happen before and after surgery. The following is some information to help in planning for the surgery.

What happens before surgery?

When you visit the plastic surgeon, be sure to ask any specific questions about the surgery. Also ask what your child may look like immediately after surgery.

The plastic surgeon's office will give you an appointment for a pre-operative visit at McMaster Children's Hospital several days before the surgery. Bring your child to the Same Day Surgery Unit on the 2nd floor near the yellow elevators. This appointment will last up to 3 hours.

During the pre-operative visit:

- Your child will see several people including a nurse and an anesthetist. Please ask them any questions you have about the surgery, the anesthesia or the hospital stay.
 - You will be given a checklist to follow the day before surgery. The instructions include when your child should stop eating and drinking before surgery. It is important to follow these rules.
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What happens on the day of surgery?

On the day of the surgery bring your child to the Same Day Surgery Unit to register your child. A member of the surgical team will meet you there. If your child is ill, the surgery may be cancelled. The hospital may cancel surgery if there is a shortage of beds available that day. This does not happen often, but it is a possibility.

A volunteer will go with you and your child to the Holding Area of the Operating Room. A member of the operating room team will then bring your child to the operating room. While your child is in the operating room, please wait in the surgery waiting lounge.

Your child will be given a general anesthetic so that he or she will be asleep during the surgery and not feel any pain. After the surgery is completed your child will be monitored in the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) for about an hour.

The nurses in PACU will place armbands on your child. The armbands will restrict the movement of your child's arms so he or she is not able to touch or tug at the repaired area and the stitches. As soon as possible, the nurse will bring you to the PACU to be with your child. When your child is ready to leave the PACU, a nurse will take you and your child to one of the children's wards.

What happens after surgery?

The ward nurses will continue to care for your child during his or her recovery.

You may see some bloody drainage coming from your child's nose or mouth. This is normal. There will also be stitches on the roof of the mouth. These will dissolve in about 6 weeks.

Do not allow your child to suck on fingers or put anything into his or her mouth. Your child should not use a pacifier (soother) for 2 weeks after the surgery.

Your child may be fussy or cranky for a few days after returning home from the hospital. He or she may have problems eating or sleeping. This is normal and should end within a week or two.

After surgery, the amount and type of pain is different for each child. Your child will be given pain medication so he or she will feel more comfortable. The plastic surgeon may give you a prescription for pain medication to use at home. To learn other ways to make your child comfortable, ask your nurse for the information sheet called **“Learning about relieving your child's pain”**.

It is important to keep the armbands on 24 hours a day for about 10 to 14 days. You may take the armbands off for short periods of time to give your child a bath or to exercise his or her arms. It may be hard to keep the armbands on but the repair must be protected so it can heal properly. When you are done with the armbands, please return them to the Cleft Lip and Palate Team.

You may notice yellow or gray patches on the palate as it heals. You may notice a small hole in the palate. This may close by itself in a few weeks. The surgeon will check the palate at your clinical visit after surgery.

Your child may have "bad breath". This is normal and will go away once the palate is healed. Your child can rinse his or her mouth with a small amount of water after eating and drinking. Continue to gently brush your child's teeth.

What can my child eat and drink?

You will be able to feed your child 3 to 4 hours after surgery. Fluids will be given from a cup. If your child does not use a cup yet, a syringe will be used.

For 2 weeks, your child should only have pureed or smooth foods. Pureed foods are foods that have been blended into a liquid or soft paste. Apple sauce and yogurt are good examples. Use a baby spoon to feed your child. Do not give your child crunchy or sticky foods.

Sucking can disrupt the healing of the palate.

For 2 weeks, your child should not:

- drink from a bottle
- use a straw
- use a pacifier (soother)
- suck on his or her fingers or put anything into his or her mouth

When can my child go home?

Your child will need to stay in the hospital for about 2 days. The surgeon will decide when your child can go home. Before going home, your baby should be drinking well, have a normal temperature (no fever), have pain well-managed with medication, and generally be in good health.

When does my child need to see the surgeon?

Make an appointment to see the plastic surgeon 10 to 14 days after surgery. During this visit, the plastic surgeon will tell you if it is okay to remove the armbands.

In the next few months, you will also need follow-up appointments with the Ear, Nose and Throat doctor, Audiologist and the Speech-Language Pathologist.

When should I call the surgeon?

Call your child's surgeon if:

- Your child injures the repaired area
- The area around the stitches is red or swollen
- There is bleeding or discharge from the stitches
- Your child feels ill or has a fever - a temperature higher than 38.9°C or 102°F for more than 24 hours
- Your child is not getting enough to drink. Signs may include: a dry mouth, no tears, not passing urine regularly or urine that is too dark.
- You have any concerns about your child

Dr. Strumas: 905-521-2100, ext. 73594

- If you cannot reach the surgeon, call your family doctor.
- If you are not able to reach either doctor, bring your baby to the emergency room at McMaster Children's Hospital.
- If you are not in the Hamilton area, go to your nearest hospital emergency room.

For more information please call:

Sue Eastwood, Coordinator

Cleft Lip and Palate Team

905-521-2100, ext. 77069

Please return the armbands to the Cleft Lip and Palate Team at the Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre or give them to Dr. Strumas.