



Cleft FAQs

What is a cleft lip?

A cleft lip is an opening in the upper lip of the mouth. A cleft lip may be accompanied by an opening in the bones of the upper jaw and/or the upper gum. 70% of patients suffering from a cleft lip, will also have a cleft palate.

What is a cleft palate?

A cleft palate occurs when the two sides of a palate do not join together, resulting in an opening in the roof of the mouth. A cleft lip and palate can occur on one side or both sides. A child can suffer from a cleft lip, a cleft palate or both.

What causes a cleft?

The exact cause is unknown. Cleft lips and cleft palates are congenital defects that occur early in embryonic development, usually within the first 6 weeks of pregnancy. Scientists believe a combination of genetic and environmental factors, such as maternal illness, drugs, poor diet or malnutrition, may lead to a cleft lip or cleft palate. If one child in a family is born with a cleft, the risk increases by 2 to 4 percent that future children in the family will suffer from the same defect.

How frequently do cleft lips and cleft palates occur?

Cleft lip and/or palate occurs in approximately 1 per 500-700 births, the ratio varying considerably across geographic areas or ethnic groupings. (World Health Organization International Collaborative Research on Craniofacial Anomalies)

Does a cleft lip or cleft palate cause problems for a child?

Yes. Children who suffer from a cleft lip and/or cleft palate may have difficulty eating, drinking and speaking. Ear disease and dental problems also occur frequently in cleft patients, as do problems with proper speech development. A child may work with a team of specialists – post surgical treatment which could include a dental specialist, an otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat specialist), a speech-language pathologist and audiologist, a geneticist and a psychologist/social worker.

Can clefting be prevented?

Operation Smile in partnership with Yale University have taken 3000 DNA samples from its patients to research the incidence and occurrence of clefts across the developing world. According to external research studies, mothers who take multivitamins containing folic acid before conception and during the first two months of pregnancy may reduce their risk of giving birth to a baby with a cleft.

Can cleft lips and cleft palates be repaired?

Yes. Surgery provides excellent results. A pediatrician and a plastic surgeon work with a child's parents to choose the best timing for surgery. Most surgeons agree that a cleft lip should be repaired by the time a baby is 3 months old. To repair the partition of mouth and nose as early as possible, a cleft palate generally is repaired between the ages of 12 and 18 months. Any surgical procedure is dependent upon a child's general health and the nature of the cleft lip or cleft palate.

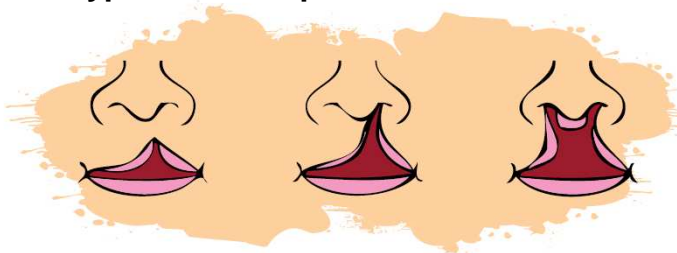
How do you feed a newborn baby with a cleft?

Babies with a cleft lip do not usually have many feeding difficulties. Breast or bottle feeding is possible. A newborn baby with a cleft palate may need extra help. A cleft palate can make it hard of a baby to form a vacuum in its mouth. The most common problems are: feeding slowly, taking in too much air whilst feeding, bringing milk up through the nose. When it proves very difficult to breastfeed, mothers often express breast milk for bottle feeding. Bottle feeding is usually most successful for babies with cleft palates but bottles are not readily available in the developing world.

Cleft Fact Sheet

- Cleft lip or Cleft palate (do not use the term harelip, it's is now seen as derogatory)
- Clefts can also affect other parts of the face, such as the eyes, ears, cheeks and forehead
- A simple cleft lip operation takes as little as 45 minutes and cost as little as £150
- Clefts are the 3rd most common birth defect globally
- A baby is born every 2 ½ minutes with a cleft
- The rate of incidence in the developing world is 1:500
- The rate of incidence in the developed world is 1:700
- We estimate that 250,000 babies are born each year in the countries that we work in alone
- 75% of cleft cases in the developing world are unlikely to receive treatment
- 70% of children born with a cleft lip will also have a cleft palate
- Clefts hamper a child's breathing, speaking, eating and drinking
- In 60% of children born with a cleft, there is no obvious family history of this condition.
- Cleft lips and a combination of a cleft lip and palate are more common in boys. Cleft palates on their own are more common in girls.
- Unilateral (one sided) clefts are more likely to affect the left side and Bilateral (double) clefts are more often found in boys than girls.
- Children with clefts are more susceptible to respiratory infections and ear disease

Types of cleft lip

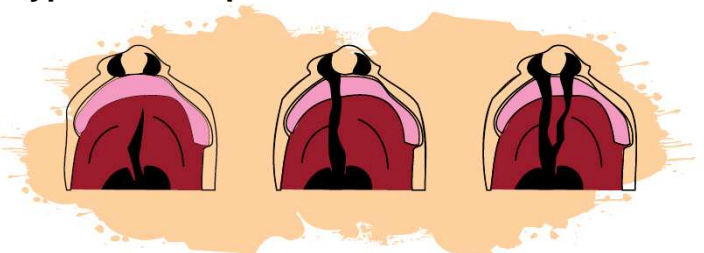


Unilateral incomplete cleft

Unilateral complete cleft

Bilateral complete cleft

Types of cleft palate



Incomplete cleft palate

Unilateral complete lip and palate

Bilateral complete lip and palate