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## Unilateral cleft lip repair

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### What is cleft palate?

Cleft lip and cleft palate are craniofacial anomalies of the mouth and lip that occur early in utero when the sides of the lip and the roof of the mouth do not fuse together as they should. A child can have cleft lip or a cleft palate, or both. A cleft palate leaves an opening in the mouth that also affects the normal positioning of the muscles that we use for speech and swallowing.

### Treating Cleft Palate

Several specialists including nurses; ear, nose and throat doctors; speech and hearing specialists; geneticists and surgeons work together to address issues of proper feeding and nutrition, hearing and language development, and restoration of normal function and appearance. We are very fortunate that the current treatment of cleft palate is very effective and offers children full functional restoration. It's very enjoyable to be a cleft surgeon because cleft palate is readily treated with surgery and you can make a lifelong difference in the life of a child and their family.

### Complications for Baby

An infant with a cleft palate may have a hard time sucking properly because the roof of the mouth is not formed completely, making eating difficult. Ear infections are also common due to a dysfunction of the tube that connects the middle ear and the throat. In addition, a child with cleft palate may have speech and language delays. The most immediate concern is that your baby gets good nutrition.

### Feeding an Infant with Cleft Palate

This can be challenging. Breast-feeding may not be a realistic way to feed an infant with a cleft palate, but pumping breast milk and using a specialized bottle is an alternative. Here are some tips:

- Hold the baby upright to help keep the food from coming out of the nose.
- Small, frequent feedings are best.
- Ask a feeding therapist familiar with feeding children with cleft palate or contact the craniofacial team to recommend types of nipples that will work best for the baby.
- Ask about extra calorie supplements you can add to breast milk or formula if needed.

## Fast Facts

- Babies born with cleft lip or palate: 1 in 500 — 1 in 2000
- Age range that is best to surgically fix a cleft palate: 9 – 12 months
- Age range that is best to surgically fix a cleft lip: 3 – 6 months

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