



CLEFTPALS VICTORIA

THE CLEFT PALATE & LIP SOCIETY

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BREASTFEEDING YOUR BABY WITH A CLEFT

Breastfeeding is a learned skill. Breastfeeding a baby with a cleft condition may be possible, but is often difficult. It requires a lot of extra time and support. It is important to realise that breastfeeding a cleft baby is quite different to breastfeeding a child without a cleft. Some mothers have had success breastfeeding their baby, but the majority tend to express and breastmilk feed through a bottle (breastmilk feeding) to ensure their baby still receives the benefits that breastmilk provides.

Cleft Lip

A baby with a cleft of the lip only is usually able to breastfeed successfully. It is a matter of finding a good position that works for you and your baby. The gap created by the cleft lip needs to be filled (either with the breast itself or a thumb or finger) so that a lip seal can be achieved. It can take a while to discover a position and/or technique that works best for you and your baby.

Cleft Palate (Cleft lip and palate / Soft palate cleft)

A cleft in the palate prevents the normal process of suction. A baby with a cleft of the palate is unable to form a vacuum inside their mouth. A vacuum is created by sealing off the oral cavity (mouth), and this vacuum allows a baby to suck milk from the breast or bottle. Because a cleft in the palate allows air to enter the mouth via the nose a vacuum cannot be created, therefore the baby cannot suck milk properly from a breast or bottle.

A baby with a cleft involving the palate is unlikely to be physically able to suck milk from the breast. Breastfeeding usually involves expressing the milk into the baby's mouth by hand, and then topping the baby up with expressed breastmilk via a cup or spoon etc. afterwards. The baby may learn to use their gums and lips to extract some milk from the breast over time, but most babies continue to need "topping up" after each breastfeed.

Breastfeeding after palate repair

Breastfeeding after surgery to repair the palate may be possible. Your baby will need to be familiar with your breasts as a source of food and comfort, which means they should have been put to the breast at every feed from birth until surgery.

It can take time for your baby to adjust to their new way of feeding, and the new feel of their mouth regardless of the feeding method.

It is possible to be fully breast-feeding a few weeks after surgery, but this requires much patience, dedication and support both before and after the palate repair.

It is important to note that a baby breastfeeding before surgery does not ensure that a they will breastfeed fully after surgery.



General Information

- ♥ CleftPals respects the choice of every parent in regards to how they feed their child. We aim to support a family's decision in the best way we can.
- ♥ Feeding your baby will take up a lot of your time no matter what method you choose.
- ♥ Breastfeeding and breastmilk feeding require dedication and support. You will need the assistance of family and friends to allow you time to feed your baby and express.
- ♥ It is important to remember that although you may not be able to breastfeed in the way that you had planned, you can still foster a very close and positive relationship with your baby.

CleftPALS Victoria Parent Information Package

This information is intended as a guide only. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice and no liability is accepted.

- ♥ YOU need to decide which method of feeding suits you and your baby best.
- ♥ Focus on the positive things - what you CAN do and what you CAN give your baby.
- ♥ Those with a strong desire to breastfeed are advised to seek professional advice from the Breastfeeding Education & Support Service (BESS).
- ♥ CleftPals can put you in touch with others who have breastfed their baby with a cleft.
- ♥ CleftPals can provide personal stories and videos from mothers who have breastfed their baby with a cleft.

Further Information and Support are available from:

- ♥ Midwives
- ♥ Australian Breastfeeding Association
- ♥ Breastfeeding Clinics
- ♥ Lactation Consultants
- ♥ Maternal and Child Health Nurses
- ♥ Royal Children's Hospital
- ♥ CleftPals

Breastfeeding Education & Support Services (BESS) Phone: 9344-3651

Mother's with a strong desire to breastfeed are advised to contact BESS. CleftPals highly recommends this service. Staff at BESS have had some experience with cleft babies and breastfeeding. They have an information sheet and some video footage of cleft babies being "breastfed".

This service is located at the Royal Women's Hospital and offers advice and support.

Contact details: Phone: 9344-3651
 Fax: 9344-3679
 Email: bess@rwh.org.au

Further Reading

Australian Breastfeeding Association information booklets Phone 9885-0855

- ♥ Breastfeeding babies with a cleft of the lip and / or palate
- ♥ Expressing and storing breastmilk