



Health and
Social Care



How to help your child's speech after surgery

Speech and Language Therapy

What did the surgery achieve?

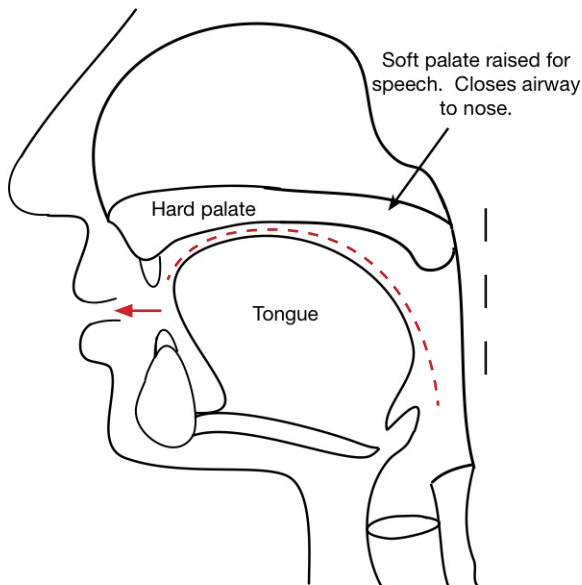
Your baby was born with an opening between their mouth and nose, called a cleft palate. This has now been repaired to create two separate spaces. Their palate is now in a better position to be able to work as best as it can.

What does this mean for my child?

The soft palate lifts up and down to make a seal with the back of the throat. This creates a total seal between the mouth and nose.

When the soft palate lifts, the air from our lungs is directed through our mouths. We then use our tongue, lips and teeth to change this air into various shapes to make different speech sounds.

The soft palate also lifts when we swallow. This means food/drink does not leak through our nose.



How will my child sound after the surgery?

You may not notice any difference in your child's talking immediately after the operation. It will take some time for them to learn how to use their new palate.

In time, you might start to hear your child use fewer 'nose sounds', such as /m, n, ng/ and start to say some 'mouth sounds' like /p, b, t, d, s/.

When can I start speech therapy?

Not all children who have had surgery on their palate require speech therapy. Your Speech and Language Therapist will tell you if some sessions might be helpful.

Sometimes babies who have a cleft palate learn to make sounds in a very different way. They might only use the back of their tongue or their throat to make sounds. These children might benefit from some help to explore different speech sounds.

As soon as your baby has recovered from their operation, it is safe to start encouraging sound play again.

How can I help my child?

Playing with your child, having fun with sounds and encouraging babble will help all babies.

Sometimes babies born with a cleft palate prefer sounds made in their throat or the back of their mouths. So instead, show them '**front sounds**' and gently say: p, b, t, d.

Hearing problems can be common in children with a cleft palate. Make sure you turn off background noise, and **sit close to your child**.



Babies like to see your face. This will also help them learn how to copy the shapes for sounds. Make sure they can **see your mouth** as you say the sounds.

Say the sounds **gently** for your child. This gives them the best chance of being able to copy you.

To help your baby listen, you can say the sound onto their hand/ foot so they can **feel the air** from your lips.

If your baby copies the sound, encourage and **praise** them.

Where can I find more ideas and information?

Various Cleft Centres in the UK have created excellent videos to help parents.

For example, if you type 'Cleft SLT Babble Bag Instructional video' into YouTube you will find a lovely video from the Cleft team in Wales.

Also, The Spires Cleft Centre have some more videos called 'Show me a Sound' and 'Say and Play together' which can be found on their website: <https://www.spirescentre.nhs.uk/treatment/slt/multisensory-input-modelling/>

Who can I contact if I am worried or have a question?

If you have any concerns or questions, you can call the Cleft Co-ordinator, Pamela Larmour, on 07385 430707. You can also email her on pamela.larmour@belfasttrust.hscni.net

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