

Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate



Cleft lip and cleft palate are holes or clefts in the upper lip, the roof of the mouth, or both, that occur when the facial structures of a fetus do not close completely. Cleft lip and cleft palate are some of the most common birth defects.

Diagnosis

A cleft lip or palate is usually identified immediately at birth. However, a cleft that occurs only in the muscles of the soft palate often goes unnoticed at birth and may not be diagnosed until later, when symptoms develop.

Symptoms

- Change in the shape of the nose
- Misaligned teeth
- Feeding difficulties
- Difficulty swallowing, with the possibility of liquids or food coming out of the nose.
- Speech impairment
- Chronic ear infections
- Growth retardation



Causes

Normally, the tissues that make up the lip and palate fuse together during the second and third months of pregnancy. In babies with cleft lips and cleft palate, fusion either never occurs or is partial, leaving an opening.

Research indicates that most cases of cleft lip and cleft palate are due to an interaction of genetic and environmental factors. In many infants, the definitive cause is never discovered.

Risk factors

- Family history of cleft lips and palate.
- Smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol or using certain medications during pregnancy.
- Obesity during pregnancy.
- Diabetes prior to pregnancy.

Treatment

It consists of surgery to correct the clefts and therapies to improve any related disorders.

In almost all infants, a series of surgeries can be performed to restore proper function and achieve an appearance with a minimal amount of scarring.



Prevention

Many cases of cleft lips and cleft palate cannot be prevented. However, steps can be taken to decrease your risk:

- If you have a family history of cleft palate or cleft lip and are planning to have a baby, tell your doctor. He or she may refer you to a genetic counselor.
- If you plan to become pregnant soon, ask your doctor if you should take prenatal vitamins.
- Do not use tobacco or alcohol. Using alcohol or tobacco during pregnancy increases the risk of having a baby with a birth defect.



Support Strategies

It is difficult for the family to receive the news that the baby has a cleft lip or cleft palate. Consider these tips for coping with the news:

- Don't blame yourself. Focus your energy on supporting and helping your child
- It is completely normal to feel sad, overwhelmed or upset. Express your emotions with a trusted family member or friend. If necessary, seek emotional support from a human behavioral professional.
- Seek support. The medical staff can help you find educational information, community and financial resources.



Social and Emocional

Find recommendations, tools and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after diagnosis and treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

APS Health

787-641-9133

References:

<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001051.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/birth-defects/es/about/labio-hendido-y-paladar-hendido.html>

Prepared by Licensed Health Educators.

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