



FEEDING AN INFANT WITH A CLEFT PALATE

What is special about feeding a baby with a cleft palate?

Babies with a cleft palate have problems getting suction because of the “air leak” between the mouth and the nose. Your baby may appear to be sucking, but the suck is not strong enough to get an adequate amount of milk out of the breast or the bottle. Because of this, breastfeeding directly from the breast may not provide enough milk for a newborn with a cleft palate to grow normally. However, we encourage every mother who is able, to pump their milk and to feed it by bottle using special nipples. Also, we encourage placing the baby at the breast for comfort and pleasure.

What can I do to help my baby eat well?

Special Nipples: Nipples that are softer and have easier flow than standard nipples. The nipple should not be directed up into the cleft.

Positioning: Hold your baby up in a semi-upright seated position with the head and shoulders in your one hand and the bottle in the other. If you are more comfortable with the baby in the crook of your elbow, place a blanket or pillow under that elbow to hold the baby more upright. This helps reduce nasal regurgitation (milk coming through the nose).

Burping: Because of the cleft, your baby will swallow more air and therefore should be burped more often. Try burping your baby in the middle of each feed as well as at the end. It is normal for some milk to occasionally come out of the nose.

Length of Feeding: Each feeding should not take more than 30 minutes. Longer feeding periods tire the baby and waste calories.

Amount of Milk: Your baby needs at least 2 ounces of milk per pound of weight each day (24 hours) to grow normally. For instance, if your baby weighs 8 lbs., then your baby will need 16 oz. of milk every 24 hours.

Ordering Bottle Nipples: Consult your pediatrician or cleft team.

Other Feeding Questions: If you have questions about the amount and type of formula your baby should be taking, check with your pediatrician.

Source: Annie Boekelheide, NP, UCSF, review of best practice