Feeding the Newborn with Cleft Lip and Palate

Good nutrition is important for the growth and development of your baby. Some babies with cleft lip and palate can eat from a bottle and later on with spoon without problems. For other babies, the cleft makes it difficult to get good suction on a bottle. Sometimes sucking and swallowing impulses do not work right in a baby with cleft lip and palate. Your baby may not get enough to eat, or may get too tired when eating. Sometimes babies have problems with food coming out of the nose. This may make the baby choke, cough, and spit. The goal of feeding your baby is to lessen these problems and ensure good weight gain.

What are some feeding Suggestions?

- **Position:**
  Holding the baby in an almost sitting position (not lying down) can help make feeding easier.

- **Nipple Selection:**
  Use a nipple that can be easily compressed. Examples are any "early" nipple (birth to three months), an "orthodontic" nipple, a "preemie" nipple, or a "newborn nuk nipple." When the bottle is upside down the milk must come out of the hole in the nipple in a slow steady drip. If the drip is not slow and steady you can cross cut or enlarge the nipple. The goal is to feed slowly enough as not to choke the baby, but fast enough as not to tire the baby out.

- **Directing Flow:**
  Direct the flow of milk to the side or back of the baby’s mouth.
- **Bottle Selection:**
  Some babies may feed well with a regular bottle, but other may need a bottle that can be squeezed, such as the "Mead Johnson nurser".

- **Burping:**
  Because of the cleft, your baby swallows air while feeding. Frequent burping will help to reduce discomfort. Burp your baby after each ounce of formula.

- **Timing of Feeding:**
  Your baby may need small, frequent feedings. In general, feedings should not take more the forty five minutes. If your baby takes longer than thirty minutes to finish a feeding, decrease the time between feedings.

- **Cleaning of the mouth:**
  Cleanse the inside of your baby's mouth with a little bit of water after every feeding. If you notice milk sitting in the baby's mouth, you can use a bulb syringe to remove it, or gently wipe it away with a piece of gauze.

**When will my child return for a follow-up appointment?**
We will give you an appointment to return to the Plastic Surgery clinic. There, you will see the Speech Language Pathologist who specializes in the feeding of babies with cleft lip and palate.

**When should I call the doctor?**
Call our clinic at 734-763-8063 for any of the following reasons:
- If your baby has signs of dehydration such as: dry skin, a sunken soft spot, or no wet diapers for six to eight hours.
- If your baby has feeding difficulties such as taking longer than forty five minutes to finish a feeding, or if she has a lot of choking or gagging.
- If the baby shows signs of tiring while eating such as falling asleep.

**What is the contact information?**
If you have any question, problems or concerns call the Pediatric Plastic Surgery clinic from 8-5:00pm Monday thru Friday, 734-763-8063. After 5:00pm or on
the weekends if you have urgent issues call hospital paging at 734 936-4000 and ask the operator to page the Plastic Surgery Resident “on call”.

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