

What about Breastfeeding?

What You Should Know

Le Leche League International advises that,

...except in rare cases, a baby with a cleft palate cannot get all the milk he needs by breastfeeding alone.

An opening in the palate makes it impossible for the baby to seal off his mouth and make the suction typically used to keep the breast (or bottle) in place and pull the nipple to the back of his mouth.

Over time, lactation consultants have found that feeding exclusively at the breast is a difficult goal for all but a few babies with uncorrected cleft palates.

- *Breastfeeding a Baby with a Cleft Lip or Cleft Palate*, La Leche League International, November 2004.

What You Can Do

Learning that breastfeeding is an unlikely option can be a source of disappointment and sadness for some families. Give yourself time and space to grieve this loss. But remember, you can still share many benefits of breastfeeding with your child:

- Express breast milk with a pump, but feed your baby with one of the bottle-feeding methods described in both the video and booklet, *Feeding Your Baby* by CPF;
- During feedings, make sure that you both enjoy eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin contact whenever possible;
- Once your baby has become successful feeding on a bottle, your baby may be put to the breast for non-nutritive sucking. Non-nutritive sucking at the breast can be a satisfying experience for both moms and babies;
- Non-nutritive sucking exercises and stimulates important muscles in your baby's mouth and tongue, and can facilitate the bonding experience. It may also help stimulate milk production for those moms who continue to pump breast milk.

What You Need

◆ **A hospital-grade breast pump**

Your lactation consultant, hospital pharmacy or local medical supply business are good places to ask for sales and rental information for these machines.

◆ **Cleft palate nurser**

Your treatment team will include a feeding specialist who will help you determine which cleft palate nurser or other feeding system works best for you and your baby.

◆ **Support system**

Ask a spouse, partner, other family member, or friend to help care for you and your baby while you are learning how to use the breast pump and feed your baby.

◆ **Time**

Learning to feed a baby with a cleft can be challenging. Learning to feed a baby with a cleft while learning to use a breast pump can be overwhelming. Allow your support system to help you make time to relax and explore how the pump best works for you.

Know When to Say When

Once you're home, experiment with a hospital-grade breast pump for a few days, use your support system, and take time to learn to express milk and feed your baby. If you decide that the pumping process isn't becoming easier or doesn't fit with the demands of work and/or other children, you may be ready to let it go. You can be pleased that you explored the possibility as fully as you could. Make the decision to move on to feeding with formula with the same love and care as breastfeeding.

For further information on cleft lip and palate, or for a referral to a cleft palate/craniofacial team, please contact:

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