



Greenville Ear, Nose & Throat

Palatoplasty: What You Need to Know

Here are common questions parents and/or patients have about repairing the cleft palate. The information below will answer most of these concerns. Rest assured, however, that we will be happy to talk with you or see your child if the issue is not resolved.

What causes cleft palate problems?

This condition often is linked to palate trauma, adenoidectomy and other congenital abnormalities.

What should happen before surgery?

Do not give aspirin, Pepto Bismol, ibuprofen (such as Advil, Motrin, PediaProfen) or naproxen (Aleve) for two weeks beforehand. (Also, do not give them for two weeks after surgery.)

Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol, Temptra, Panadol) may be given as well as over-the-counter cold medications and antibiotics. Please tell your doctor if you have a family history of bleeding tendencies or if your child bruises easily.

What about the surgery itself?

Palatoplasty surgery is done on an inpatient (23-hour stay) basis. The surgery lasts about 2 hours. The surgery is done to make the palate longer and to reorient the palate muscle fibers. Your child will remain in the hospital at least 1 night.

What are risks or alternatives?

Possible risks of this procedure include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Pain
- Delayed healing
- Dehydration
- Prolonged nausea and vomiting
- Bleeding, which may be severe (and may require a second surgery or blood transfusion)
- Difficulty swallowing
- Change in voice, which may require speech therapy or more surgery
- Palate fistula (hole from the mouth to nose)
- Scarring that leads to nasal blockage
- Snoring or sleep apnea

Practical alternatives to this operation include observation with continued speech therapy and/or using a prosthesis (palatal lift or obturator) or other surgical procedure.

What can I anticipate in the hospital?

Most children have throat pain and swelling. They will stay in the hospital to be observed closely for breathing problems and to make sure that they can take enough fluids by mouth.

HOME POSTOPERATIVE CARE

How long does it take to recover?

It takes most children 7-10 days to recover from cleft palate surgery. Some children feel better in just a few days, while some may take up to 14 days to recover.

What can my child drink after surgery?

The most important part of recovery is to drink lots of fluids. Some children avoid drinking because of pain. Offer and encourage lots of fluids or soft foods such as juice, soft drinks, Popsicles, Jell-O, pudding, yogurt and ice cream. However, avoid milk products (such as pudding, yogurt and ice cream) for the first 24 hours.

When drinking, children sometimes have a small amount of liquid come out of their nose—this usually stops within a few weeks.

Some children have nausea and vomiting from the anesthesia—this occasionally occurs during the first 24 hours after surgery and usually stops on its own. Please call our office if you are worried that your child is not drinking enough or has signs of dehydration (such as peeing less than 2-3 times a day or crying but having no tears).

What can my child eat?

After surgery, your child should not use a bottle, forks and knives for 1 week. In younger children, elbow guards may help prevent their hands from entering the mouth. However, the sooner eating and chewing are resumed, the quicker the recovery. Thus, encourage your child to eat soft foods during this time.

Many children avoid eating, though, because of pain. As long as drinking is good, do not worry about eating. Many children are not interested in eating for up to 1 week. Some lose weight, which is gained back when normal eating resumes.

Will my child have a fever?

A low-grade fever is normal for several days after surgery. Please call our office if the temperature exceeds 102°F.

What can my child do?

Most children rest at home for several days. Activity can increase as the child desires. Generally, children can return to school when they are eating and drinking normally, off pain medication and sleeping through the night—usually 7-10 days.

For your child's safety, please do not leave the Greenville area for 2 weeks after surgery.

Will there be breathing problems?

Snoring and mouth breathing are normal after surgery because of swelling. Normal breathing should resume 10-14 days after surgery.

What about bleeding?

With the exception of small specks of blood from the nose or in the saliva, bright red blood should NOT be seen. If this occurs, call the office right away or go straight to Greenville Health System's Children's Emergency Center (open 24 hours).

Will my child be in pain?

Most children have a fair amount of throat pain after surgery. Many also complain of earaches. That's because the same nerve that goes to the throat also goes to the ears.

Some children have jaw and neck pain, which is from the positioning of the head in the operating room.

Many children have trouble eating, drinking and sleeping because of pain. The severity may fluctuate from mild to very severe and may last up to 14 days.

What can control the pain?

For the first few days, give acetaminophen and ibuprofen. Then, reduce as needed, alternating up to every three hours with the following dosing schedule:

For mild pain:

Give acetaminophen every 4-6 hours as needed. You can alternate it with ibuprofen every 6 hours as needed.

Another option is to switch off acetaminophen and ibuprofen every 3 hours.

For breakthrough pain (pain not controlled by drugs above): Older children can receive a stronger pain medication, such as hydrocodone. Alternate it with acetaminophen every 4-6 hours as needed. However, do not use hydrocodone/acetaminophen while your child is sleeping.

Another option is to switch off hydrocodone and ibuprofen every 3 hours.

Do not use Lortab to prevent pain or give it to a sleepy child.

When is the follow-up visit?

A visit to your child's surgeon is needed 2 weeks after surgery. Your child probably will require speech therapy as well.

Please call our office if you have questions about this information: Patewood (864) 454-4368.