



## **Oral Feeding Babies with a Cleft Lip and /or Cleft Palate**

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Parents of an infant with a cleft lip and/or palate may be concerned about whether their baby will have problems with their feeding. Overall, babies who are born with a cleft lip and/or cleft palate in isolation will be able to orally feed with the appropriate feeding support. The type of feeding (breastfeeding versus bottle feeding) that will be possible is dependent on the type of cleft a baby is born with.

### **What if my baby has a cleft lip?**

Babies with a cleft lip can generally breastfeed or bottle feed similar to children without a cleft lip. The cleft lip generally does not impact an infant's ability to orally feed.

### **What if my baby has a cleft lip and a cleft of the alveolus (gum line)?**

Both breastfeeding and bottle feeding are *often* possible when a baby presents with this type of cleft. The one exception may be if your baby presents with a cleft that is very wide, as there may be difficulty with their latch. Therefore, if oral feeding difficulties are noted a referral to both the feeding expert on your Cleft Lip and Palate Program and a Lactation Consultant is strongly recommended.

### **What if my baby has a cleft palate (which may or may not include a cleft lip)?**

When a baby breastfeeds or bottle feeds, adequate suction must be created to efficiently transfer milk. To create suction, a baby must be able to completely seal their oral cavity. A baby who is born with a cleft palate is unable to completely seal their oral cavity as the cleft palate produces an air leak that impairs the creation of suction. Therefore, babies with a cleft palate will require a specially designed bottle. Two recommended bottles are the Medela Special Needs ®Feeder (also referred to as the Haberman feeder) or the Mead Johnson Cleft Lip/Palate Nurser® (see below for descriptions). Both the Special Needs Feeder and the Mead Johnson Cleft Lip/Palate Nurser eliminate a baby's need to create suction, and allow babies to successfully bottle feed. When a baby has a cleft palate, a referral to the feeding expert on your Cleft Lip and Palate Program is required to ensure you have the appropriate education and support with oral feeding.

Many parents ask about breastfeeding their baby with a cleft palate. Although exclusive breast feeding is not possible when a baby has a cleft palate due to the baby's inability to create adequate suction and obtain enough volumes to grow, if a mother wishes to incorporate breastfeeding, there are ways to do so. For mothers who wish to give their babies breast milk, expressing breast milk is encouraged. In addition, mothers can also offer breastfeeding after a bottle feed which can enhance attachment between mother and baby and provide direct skin-to-skin contact. A referral to a Lactation Consultant is highly recommended to further provide this support to mothers.



## Medela Special Needs ®Feeder



The Medela Special Needs Feeder offers a variable flow rate controlled by the feeder and the baby; you and baby are in control of the flow of milk, leading to a more natural feeding experience. It has a one way valve and comes with a Mini-SpecialNeeds teat. This innovative design rewards the weakest suck, and it also prevents flooding so baby is never overwhelmed with too much milk.

It is BPA/DEHP free and is in sterile packaging.

## Mead Johnson Cleft Lip/Palate Nurser®



Mead Johnson Bottle is a soft squeeze bottle with long cross cut nipple. Mead Johnson Bottle is designed to be "pulse" squeezed with baby's suck and swallowing. Longer nipple allows milk to be directed past the cleft and cross cut allows increase flow with squeezing. NUK and premie nipples also work well on this bottle. The

holes on the nipples of the Mead Johnson Bottle may need to be made larger to allow milk to flow faster.

### **In Conclusion**

Overall, no two babies are alike and babies can have differences in how they feed, even if they have the same type of cleft. At any point in time, if you have concerns that your baby is not feeding well, regardless of the type of cleft that your baby has, you should contact the feeding expert on your Cleft Lip and Palate Program for further assessment and support.