

## 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 makes 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.”\*

### What You Can Do

Learning that breastfeeding is an unlikely option for you and your baby can be a source of disappointment and sadness for some families. If this is a loss that needs to be grieved, allow time and space to do that. Eventually, consider that you can still feel good about sharing many of the benefits of breastfeeding with your child:

- Express breast milk with a pump, but feed your baby with one of the bottle-feeding systems described;
- During feedings, position your baby so that you both may enjoy eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin contact whenever possible;
- Once you and your baby have established successful bottle feeding, baby may be put to the breast for non-nutritive sucking; even if direct-breastfeeding isn't baby's main

source for nutrition delivery, baby may still enjoy time at the breast.

### 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 cleft-palate craniofacial treatment team will include a feeding specialist who will help you experiment with a cleft-palate nurser or other feeding system that 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***

If after a few days experimenting with a hospital-grade breast pump, using your support system, and taking your time to learn to express milk and feed your baby, you see 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

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



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:**

**Cleft Palate Foundation  
1504 East Franklin Street, Suite 102  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514**

**800.24.CLEFT  
919.933.9044  
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