Children’s Services and Surgical Services

Feeding advice following cleft palate surgery

Feeding preparation before surgery
In the weeks leading up to your child’s operation it may be helpful to plan some meals that will be suitable for your child after their surgery. Getting suitable foods from the shops and trying out a few meals beforehand can make things a little easier later on. It is good to try and think of ways to adapt the texture of your child’s favourite foods while maintaining the tastes that they are familiar with. For example mashing foods so that they are soft or cooking fruits and vegetables so that they are soft.

Nutrition
It is important that you try to continue to give your child a good variety of foods while keeping to the dietary restrictions.

A balanced diet should consist of:
- Protein foods (for example meat, fish, tofu)
- Starchy carbohydrate (for example potatoes, pasta, noodles)
- Fruit and vegetables
- Calcium containing foods (for example milk, yogurt, cheese)
- Treats

Immediately after surgery:
Babies can resume feeding (breast/bottle feeding) on demand following surgery. It can be helpful to keep a record of what your baby takes in the first few days at home after surgery. Adequate fluids are important and your Clinical Nurse Specialist will advise you about the amount to aim for.

Children can be given drinks/suitable foods at their request – this could be in the recovery area or when your child has returned to ward D2.

Straws should not be used as they could damage the surgical repair.

Any foods, milk or medicines should be followed by 5ml to 10ml of water.

Helpful tips
In order to supply sufficient calorie intake for healing and to continue to support growth extra gravy, butter, olive oil, cream, cheese etc can be added to meals.
You may wish to offer milk or smoothies, etc between meals to help keep up energy levels.

Please note that there is a limited selection of soft foods available on the ward so you may like to bring in clearly labelled foods from home for your child. There are fridge/freezer and microwave facilities available on the ward for your convenience.

Below, we have listed a few foods that your child could eat during the first three weeks following surgery. Please note that these are only suggestions. The list is not extensive but will hopefully make it easier for you and your child to discover something suitable. You might have additional ideas, which we are very happy to discuss with you as well as answer any questions you might have. We recommend avoiding foods that are ‘bitty’ (for example rice, raisins, lentils, cous cous) as pieces can become lodged in and around the stitches as well as foods that are sharp/hard (for example toast, pizza, crisps, hard fruits such as apple) as they may damage the surgical repair/wound site. Foods that become sticky once chewed such as chocolate and bread should also be avoided until healed.

**In the first week after surgery:**

During this early stage, all foods should be of a soft consistency. Babies can be offered jars or pureed foods. Children can be offered meals of a soft consistency such as shepherd’s/cottage pie, cereals softened with milk, flaky fish (no batter/coating), tinned spaghetti, eggs (scrambled/fried/poached), soft fruits (tinned, cooked or mashed), soft cooked vegetables such as broccoli, soups, smoothies and jelly, custard, yoghurt.

**In the second week after surgery:**

Continue to offer soft foods as above, gradually introducing slightly more textured foods. Textures such as soft-cooked pasta in sauces (eg macaroni cheese), pancakes/soft Yorkshire puddings, noodles, slow-cooked/pulled meats.

**In the third week after surgery:**

Firmer more textured foods can be reintroduced at this stage such as bread, rice, cous cous, well cooked vegetables. Continue to avoid any sharp or bitty foods during this week, gradually returning to a normal diet thereafter.

If you are concerned that your child is not eating well after surgery, please speak to a cleft clinical nurse specialist on 01223 596272.
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