

Can Clefts Be Prevented? It's hard to say. Some research has shown that taking multivitamins containing folic acid before conception and during pregnancy may reduce your baby's risk of having a cleft. And most experts agree that reducing exposure to teratogens will definitely reduce risk of a cleft. Mothers who drink and smoke heavily greatly increase their chances of having a baby with a cleft. Certain drugs and medications like seizure medications for epilepsy increase the risk of clefts. And of course, a family history of clefts increase the risk as well. If your family has a history of clefting of any kind you may want to meet with a genetic counselor. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

How You Can Reduce The Risk Of Having A Baby With A Cleft. Speak to your doctor about any medications you take, avoid teratogens, don't drink alcohol or smoke, take multivitamins to ensure that you are getting enough B vitamin folic acid, and make sure you avoid taking excessive amounts of vitamin A early in pregnancy, as this may cause birth defects. Speak to your doctor about the appropriate amount of vitamin A for you. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

Can Clefts Be Repaired? Of course. Reconstructive surgery for clefts has evolved over more than half a century and today's techniques and procedures have come a long way. Most experts agree that cleft lips should be repaired within the first three months after birth. Cleft palates can be operated on between nine and eighteen months. Most children with clefts in developed countries undergo a series of surgeries as they grow up. Depending on the severity of their clefts and other factors, a child could undergo between 5 – 15 surgeries during their first 20 years. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

What Research Is Being Done On Clefts? There are literally hundreds of research projects under way around the world that are trying to find out what causes clefts and how they can be prevented. There is no way to tell if a breakthrough in this area will come next week or next century, although much progress has been made. Would you like to learn more about this topic? Visit www.SmileTrain.org.

The Importance Of Finding The Right Doctors. In America, there are teams that specialize in caring for children with clefts and most experts would agree that an experienced and accomplished cleft team is the best resource to care for a child with a cleft. Reconstructive surgery is just one aspect of the problem. In addition to surgery, which is required to repair the cleft, children with clefts often have trouble with eating, dental problems, hearing, speech, and psychological development as they get older. That's why it is so important that parents of a child with a cleft should find the best Cleft Lip and Palate Team they can, as quickly as they can. This team will likely include a plastic surgeon, dentist, pediatrician, social worker, speech and language specialist, hearing specialist, an ear, nose and throat specialist, a psychologist, nurse, and a genetic counselor. **To find a Cleft Lip and Palate Team in your area, visit www.SmileTrain.org, click on the "Medical" tab, then on "U.S. Cleft Teams."**

Other Sources Of Information On Cleft Lip And Palate. In addition to this valuable information, The Smile Train offers tens of thousands of pages of information regarding cleft-related medical journal content, news articles and stories, important cleft resources for patients, their families, cleft medical professionals, medical students and leading cleft organizations around the world. Please visit the world's largest cleft web site at www.SmileTrain.org or call us at **1-877-KID-SMILE** (1-877-543-7645).



245 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2201
New York, NY 10016
1-877-KID-SMILE (1-877-543-7645)
www.SmileTrain.org

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IMPORTANT HEALTH INFORMATION REGARDING CLEFT LIP AND PALATE.

This information is intended to help women who are thinking about becoming pregnant; women who are pregnant; anyone who has a family history of clefts and is worried about having a baby with a cleft lip and/or palate; children, men and women who were born with clefts and their parents and families; cleft surgeons; cleft researchers; doctors and other medical professionals who are involved in cleft care; and medical students who want to learn more about the birth defect known as cleft lip and palate.

Defining Cleft Lip And Palate. A cleft occurs when certain body parts and structures do not fuse together during the development of the fetus. Clefts can involve the lip, the roof of the mouth (which is called the hard palate), and the soft tissue in the back of the mouth (the soft palate). Clefts can occur in any combination and with a broad range of severity. Clefts have become the number one birth defect in many developing countries, and there are an estimated 132,000 new babies a year born with clefts in developing countries. The vast majority of these children will never receive the reconstructive surgery they need and suffer their entire lives with unrepaired clefts. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

When Do Clefts Occur And How Common Are They? Clefts occur very early in the development of the fetus and many women may not even know they are pregnant when their fetus is developing a cleft. This can be a problem for obvious reasons. Stopping smoking and drinking two months after conception may be too late to avoid the negative effects on the fetus and a resulting cleft. The crucial time for head and face development of a fetus is between the third and ninth weeks of pregnancy. A lip typically fuses within 5 to 6 weeks after conception and a palate usually fuses within 10 weeks or so. There are varying opinions on the actual incidence of clefts but most experts agree that the incidence varies depending on ethnicity. Some experts say that the highest cleft birth rates are amongst Asians (1.7 per thousand births) and some American Indians (3.6 per thousand births). Caucasians have an average incidence of one cleft per thousand births. And Blacks have the lowest incidence of one cleft per 2,500 births. Baby boys have more clefts than baby girls. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

CHILDREN BEFORE SURGERY



Maria – Bulgaria



Rishav – India



Shan Furong – China

What Are The Causes Of Cleft Lip And Palate? No one knows exactly. But most experts agree that the causes are “multi-factorial” and may include a genetic predisposition as well as environmental issues such as drug and alcohol use, smoking, maternal illness, infections and lack of vitamin B folic acid. You are at higher risk for having a baby with a cleft if you are over 35 years old, a teenager, and are exposed to teratogens which include medications, chemicals, infectious disease, and environmental agents that can disrupt the normal development of a fetus. A few examples of teratogens include alcohol, cocaine, cigarettes, seizure medications (like Dilantin, Valporic Acid, and Tegretol), thalidomide, accutane, chemotherapy, lithium, organic solvents, chemicals, lead, anesthetic gases, organic mercury as well as diseases such as rubella, cytomegalovirus, genital herpes, chicken pox, Fifth disease, toxoplasmosis, and diabetes, as well as radiation and hyperthermia. The duration and frequency that the fetus is exposed to teratogens determines the severity of the impact. Clefts can occur alone or with other abnormalities. Approximately one out of every six babies born with clefts has other birth defects and some situations involve genetic syndromes, which is why all newborn babies with clefts need to be thoroughly examined by a qualified physician as soon as possible. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

Are The Causes Of Cleft Palate Different? Again, no one knows exactly. A genetic predisposition along with certain environmental factors is usually responsible. Smoking, alcohol, and lack of folic acid seem to cause cleft palates while anti-seizure medications do not. Babies with cleft palates are usually more at risk of genetic syndromes and have other birth defects. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

SAME CHILDREN AFTER SURGERY



Cleft Lip Repair. Cleft lips come in a broad range of severity and disfigurement. Some can be as mild as a slight notch in the red part of the upper lip to a severe cleft lip involving total separation of the lip all the way up into the nose. Cleft lips can involve a single cleft (which is known as a unilateral cleft), or a double cleft (bilateral cleft). They always occur on the upper lip. Usually a surgeon will operate on a cleft lip when the baby is approximately ten weeks old. This surgery is relatively simple, safe and quick. Some cleft lip surgeries take as little as 45 minutes. Usually all of the material is there - it just fused improperly. The surgeon makes incisions to free up this tissue and then reconnects it the way it should have been joined originally. The function of the muscle and appearance of the “Cupid's Bow” can be completely restored and often the deformity of the nose can be improved as well, either during the initial surgery or later. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

Cleft Palate Repair. Just like cleft lips, the severity of a cleft palate can range from a tiny little hole in back of the roof of the mouth to a major cavity that runs all the way from the front to the back of the mouth. A cleft palate can occur on one side or both sides of the upper mouth. This surgery is more complicated and difficult than cleft lip surgery, which is why it is typically done later than cleft lip surgery. Usually the child should be at least nine to eighteen months old. The surgeon will cut on both sides of the cleft palate and then bring the tissue and muscles together in the center of the palate, being very careful to leave enough length so that the baby will be able to eat and speak normally as it gets older. Ideally, children with cleft palates are operated on before they learn to speak to avoid developing speech impediments. Severe cleft palates make speech very difficult. If a child with a cleft palate is operated on later in life, speech therapy is often needed to help eliminate any speech impediments. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

What To Expect After Surgery. Children who have cleft palates are at a much greater risk of developing ear infections because a cleft palate can often impact the middle ear. Sometimes small ventilation tubes are used and inserted in the eardrum to permit drainage and improve air circulation. You should discuss this with an ear, nose and throat surgeon. This is a very minor procedure that can be done during the cleft palate surgery or afterwards. Most children, as they get older, require additional surgeries to reshape the nose, lip, gums and palate until they are in their early 20s. During this period, it is essential that these children receive support from their families and friends to ensure that their self-esteem and confidence develop as they should. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

What Special Problems Come With Clefts? Clefts often are accompanied by a broad range of other problems, such as ear disease, impaired cognitive development, eating problems, psychological problems, depression, low self-esteem, speech problems, and dental and orthodontic problems. Just as every cleft is different, every child with a cleft is different and each one needs a comprehensive treatment plan that is individualized for their specific needs. Usually the best way to develop these treatment plans is by finding a team of doctors who specialize in clefts. You need a team to address all of the different specialties involved, such as surgery; ear, nose and throat; speech; audiology; genetics; psychology; social work; dentistry and orthodontics, etc. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.

The Impact Of Clefts On Speech. Most children who have cleft lips do not have any speech problems. It's the children with cleft palates who face major issues regarding speech. The impact on speech depends on the severity of the cleft palate. These children may take longer to develop speech and when they do, they may talk slower than most children, may have a very nasal-sounding speech, and may find it hard to pronounce certain words. After surgery, however, speech therapy can help a child develop normal speech. Would you like to learn more about this topic? We have tens of thousands of pages of cleft-related content from the world's most respected medical journals, leading magazines and newspapers, and cleft-related web sites, and all of it is available to you for free when you visit www.SmileTrain.org.