

# BE PROUD OF YOUR MOUTH

## CLEFT ORAL HEALTH BEGINS AT HOME

Your child's first smile. Their first words.  
The songs you sing with them at bedtime.  
The laughter they'll share with their friends.  
The ideas that they will one day share with  
the world.

Many of the best things in life depend on good  
oral health at every age. Good oral health  
is key to your baby's health and well-being  
throughout their entire life – and yours, too!

All children need access to dental care to  
ensure a lifetime of happy and healthy smiles,  
but babies born with clefts, one of the world's  
most common birth differences, are at a higher  
risk for cavities, gum disease, and tooth decay  
throughout their lives.

### FACT

Worldwide, 1 in 700 babies are born  
with a cleft lip and/or palate, making  
it one of the world's most common  
birth differences.

## CLEFTS AND ORAL HEALTH

Clefts are one of the most common birth  
differences in the world, affecting an estimated  
1 in 700 babies. A cleft occurs when certain  
body parts and structures do not fuse together  
during fetal development. Clefts can involve the  
lip and/or the roof of the mouth.

Around the world, many children with clefts will  
never receive the essential care they need.

Treating oral health challenges like cavities,  
gum disease, and tooth decay conditions is  
often painful, expensive and, for many families  
and children affected by clefts, inaccessible.  
Prevention is low-cost, simple, and key to



ensuring that children with clefts are able to thrive at every age – and can be proud of their mouth at every stage of cleft treatment.

All members of your child’s comprehensive cleft care team need to take part in monitoring and maintaining your child’s oral health – and that includes you and your child, the most important people on the team! Good oral health – and prevention of oral health diseases – starts at home.

Here are some tips to help cleft-affected families and children better understand and support good oral health at every stage of life.

## HEALTHY HABITS AT EVERY AGE

### 0 - 2 YEARS

- Always keep a clean environment. Wipe your baby’s gums after each feed by using a soft cloth or finger brush.
- Once a month, you should “lift the lip” to check and ensure your baby’s teeth and gums look healthy. Watch for white or brown spots.
- Avoid putting honey or sweetened drinks in feeding bottles; this may lead to tooth decay.



### FACT

Early care and treatment is an essential part of supporting the mental and emotional health of children with clefts, with benefits that last a lifetime.

- Discourage thumb sucking/pacifier use, which can impact how teeth grow and develop.
- Teeth may begin to appear at around six months. Check your child’s mouth regularly to see if any teeth have cut.
- Once your child’s first tooth has appeared, use a small toothbrush with a small amount of fluoride toothpaste to clean their teeth.
- Don’t forget to visit your oral health provider by your child’s first birthday.

### 2 - 18+ YEARS

Between the ages of two and 18, your child’s teeth and mouth change a lot – but the care and prevention they need stays largely the same! Your child will also take increasing responsibility for maintaining their own oral health – so these tips are also for them.

- Continue to visit your dentist regularly, at least twice per year, to receive preventative care.
- Brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day to avoid tooth decay and gum disease. Use a small-headed, soft toothbrush and a small amount of fluoride toothpaste.

- Clean between your teeth every day with floss, paying specific attention to the area of the cleft.
- Choose healthy snacks like fruit, plain yogurt, or cheese – try to stay away from sugary snacks!
- Avoid sugary drinks – only drink milk and water between meals.
- Wear a mouthguard for sports.

## ORTHODONTICS

Many children with clefts need braces at some point in their treatment journey.

### If you wear braces, be sure to:

- Take special care to clean around the braces, including between the teeth, under the brackets and wires.
- Avoid hard, sticky, and chewy foods that may break the braces.



## FACT

An estimated 90% of people with clefts suffer from oral health diseases.

Remember: A healthy smile (and a healthy life) at every age starts with good oral health habits from day one, and everyone has a role to play when it comes to ensuring good oral health for cleft-affected patients!

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**Look after your oral health for a lifetime of smiles**