

Cleft Lip and Palate

WHAT IS CLEFT LIP AND PALATE?

Cleft Lip and/or Palate happens early on in the development of the fetus when the lip, gum and palate fail to fuse together. This leaves a 'cleft' (gap) in the lip or palate or both.

WHAT CAUSES CLEFT LIP AND PALATE?

No one is quite sure, but doctors think that most clefts are probably caused by a mixture of genetic and environmental factors (for example certain drugs, infections, illnesses and possibly a shortage of folic acid in the mother during pregnancy). Most incidences of Cleft Lip and Palate occur 'out of the blue', although there is a history of it in some families.

A PERSON WITH A CLEFT LIP AND/OR PALATE MAY BE AFFECTED BY SOME, OR ALL, OF THE FOLLOWING:

A Cleft Lip and/or Palate is usually repaired before a child is one year old but further corrective surgery may be necessary. Surgery may leave visible scars on the face which can make a person very self-conscious. There can be problems with hearing associated with middle ear infections ('glue ear'). Speech can be affected. Some people with repaired clefts sound nasal and can be difficult to understand because they find it hard to produce certain consonants. They may also speak too loudly if they do not hear well. Teeth may be crooked or missing and require treatment by an orthodontist. A young person with a cleft may need to wear dental braces earlier than most. Feeling 'different' from peers and worrying about appearance and/or speech can affect a young person's confidence and self-esteem. Some students with clefts who are teased or bullied about how they look withdraw further into themselves. A few become difficult or aggressive to hide the hurt they feel.

OTHER INFORMATION

One in every 650 babies in the UK is born with a Cleft Lip and/or Cleft Palate. Hospital treatment is managed by a Cleft Lip and Palate Team made up of many different specialists.

A young person with a Cleft Lip and/or Palate may be helped by a plastic surgeon, speech and language therapist, oral surgeon, orthodontist (for teeth), ENT (ear, nose and throat) surgeon, paediatrician (who specialises in children's health), audiologist (for hearing) and child psychologist (to talk to about any problems).

Students may need some days off school because of hospital appointments and operations (which may continue until they have stopped growing). These absences can cause anxiety about falling behind with school work, being forgotten by friends or stared at when they return after surgery and their appearance has changed.

Occasionally, children born with Cleft Lip and Palate may have other problems because clefts form part of a number of Syndromes. These Syndromes can involve problems with sight, hearing, fingers and toes, and may involve learning difficulties.

If you are interested in finding out more about Cleft Lip and/or Palate, you can write (enclosing an A5 stamped addressed envelope) to: Cleft Lip and Palate Association (CLAPA), 1st Floor Green Man Tower 332 Goswell Road London EC1V 7LQ Tel. 020 7833 4883