



Patient & Family Guide  
2024

# Cleft Lip and Palate Surgery

Victoria General (VG)  
Site



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Cleft Lip and Palate Surgery

Cleft lip and palate surgery is done to correct differences in the lip, nose, jaws, and roof of the mouth. Your surgeon may need to take bone from your hip to make certain changes (like cleft alveoli).

## Before your surgery

- Stop smoking at least 24 hours (1 day) before your surgery. Smoking can slow your healing. Smoking and vaping are not allowed anywhere on hospital grounds. This includes electronic cigarettes (“e-cigs”).
- **Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your surgery. Your surgery will be cancelled if you eat or drink after this time.** Eating and drinking can cause nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting (throwing up) during or after your surgery.

## The day of your surgery

- Nova Scotia Health is scent-free. **Do not** use scented products (like perfume, aftershave, scented deodorant, or hairspray). **If you have used any of these products, your surgery may be cancelled.**

- **Do not** bring valuables to the hospital. The hospital is not responsible for the loss of any item.
- Please arrive at the hospital at least 1 ½ hours (90 minutes) before your surgery. Go to:  
Same Day Surgery  
Victoria Building, 10<sup>th</sup> floor  
Victoria General (VG) site, QE II
- The nurse will ask you questions about your health. They will check your vital signs (like pulse and blood pressure).
- You may need blood tests.
- The oral (mouth) surgeon will talk with you (unless they have already done so).
- You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. Please **do not** wear any undergarments (like a bra or underwear).
- Give the nurse the name and phone number of your contact person to call when your surgery is done.
- Your surgery will take 6 to 10 hours. This will depend on the type of surgery you are having.
- After your surgery, the surgeon will call your contact person.

## After your surgery

- You will be taken to the recovery area. You will stay there for 1 to 4 hours. This will depend on the length of your surgery.
- The nurses will take your vital signs several times while you are in the recovery area. This is normal.
- You will be given medications to make you comfortable, prevent nausea, and help with any nasal congestion (stuffiness) you may have. These medications will be given through an intravenous (I.V.) in your hand or arm until you are drinking well on your own.
- **Before you get out of bed for the first time, ring your call bell for your nurse.** It is common to be dizzy. Until you are steady on your feet, a nurse will help you to the bathroom.
- For the first 2 days, your mouth and nose will drip a small amount of blood. This is common.
- For the first 3 days, your face will start to swell. The swelling will slowly go down over 3 to 4 weeks. We will put ice packs on your face to help lower swelling.

## **If you had surgery on your upper lip, you will have stitches:**

- › We will put an antibiotic cream on your upper lip several times a day to prevent infection. **Use this cream for 14 days (2 weeks) after your surgery.**
- › **Keep your stitches clean.**
- › **The stitches are usually taken out 7 days (1 week) after your surgery.**
- **You may have plastic tubes in your nose.**  
These let your nose heal properly.
  - › **Do not try to take out the tubes. You can breathe through them.**
  - › **The tubes will stay in place with stitches for 1 week.** These tubes will be removed by your surgeon.

## **If bone was taken from your hip:**

- You will have stitches near your waist. These stitches are often covered by tape for about 2 weeks. **It is important to keep the tape dry.**
- Once you are fully awake and comfortable, you will be taken to your hospital room.
- When you are in your room, you can have visitors. We will try to meet the wishes of you and your care partners. We must also respect the rights and needs of other patients.
  - › Please check with the nurses about visiting guidelines for your unit. Visitors may be asked to leave when the doctors or nurses come to see you.
- You will be encouraged to drink fluids. Your I.V. will be taken out only when:
  - › all of the I.V. medications have been given.
  - › you are drinking enough fluids.
- Once you feel steady on your feet, you will be encouraged to get up and walk. You may need help walking for the first day. This is common.
- If bone was taken from your hip, you may have discomfort while walking for a few days. This will get better.
- A dietitian will talk with you about what you can and cannot eat as you recover. If you can, have the person who cooks your meals at this meeting.

- Your health care team will talk with you about mouth care. **It is very important to rinse your mouth as told by your health care team.** Keeping your mouth clean after surgery helps to prevent infection.
- **Do not** brush your teeth until you are told to do so. Brushing your teeth too soon after surgery can damage the stitches in your mouth.
- The resident surgeons will see you each morning. Please tell them if you have any questions or concerns.
- The surgeon cannot tell you how many days you will be in the hospital. You will only be discharged home when:
  - › you are eating and drinking well.
  - › you are comfortable.
- **If bone was taken from your hip, do not take a bath for 3 weeks, unless your surgeon tells you otherwise.**
- **It is OK to shower. Do not get your dressing wet.**
- **Do not** blow your nose or use a straw to drink for 2 weeks after your surgery. These activities can damage the surgery site (open the wound).

## **Discharge checklist**

- Has your surgeon told you that you are ready to be discharged and go home?
- Have you arranged for a ride home?
- Have you had X-rays taken after your surgery?
- Have you met with the dietitian?
- Were you given a follow-up appointment for the Oral Surgery Clinic?
- Did the oral surgeon give you instructions about your care at home?
- Have you been told when to have your stitches removed?
- Do you have your prescriptions?

**If you answered no to any of these questions, talk with your nurse.**



# **Questions or concerns once you are home**

## **Urgent questions**

- › Phone: 902-473-5238
- › Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.,  
Monday to Friday
- Messages will be returned as soon as possible.
- If it is outside of the above hours, call 902-473-2222 and ask for the oral surgery resident on call. Stay on the line and the resident will be with you shortly.

## **Non-urgent questions**

### **Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Clinic**

- › Phone: 902-473-2070
- › Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.,  
Monday to Friday
- Messages will be returned as soon as possible.



This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:  
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

*Prepared by:* Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, QE II  
*Designed by:* Nova Scotia Health Library Services

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