



POST-OPERATIVE CARE

Alveolar Cleft Repair

Home care instructions after bone grafting of the gum (alveolus)



Please note: These instructions are specific to patients of Northeast Facial and Oral Surgery Specialists, LLC. Every patient's post-operative care is unique. You may be given specific instructions by your surgeon that differ from what appears on this sheet. If so, follow your surgeon's instructions. This document should be used as a guide only and does not replace the medical advice of your treating provider.

SWELLING PEAKS

48–72 hours

SOFT, NO-CHEW DIET

2–6 weeks

NO BRUSHING THE SITE

6 weeks

FIRST FOLLOW-UP

2–3 weeks

01 What to expect after surgery

- **Expect noticeable swelling of the upper lip and cheek.** Swelling usually builds over the first 48–72 hours and can last up to a week. With bone graft substitute (BMP), this swelling is often more pronounced than families expect — it is part of normal healing, not a sign of infection.
- **Bruising may appear as the swelling settles.** It fades over the following one to two weeks.
- **The mouth may feel numb at first.** Long-acting numbing medicine is used during surgery. As it wears off the area will feel sore — this is expected.
- **Stitches in the mouth dissolve on their own.** Do not pick at them. Some ooze or pink-tinged saliva in the first day or two is normal.
- **Complete healing takes about six weeks.** Bone continues to fill in and strengthen over the months that follow.

02 Diet & eating

- **Start with liquids and puréed foods.** For the first 2–3 weeks (or as your surgeon directs), stay with a full-liquid or puréed, pourable diet — smoothies without seeds, yogurt, pudding, thin cereals, creamed soups, and milkshakes.
- **Advance to soft foods only as directed.** A soft, no-chew diet is often continued for up to six weeks after surgery.
- **Do not chew on the repaired side.** Keep chewing pressure off the grafted area entirely while it heals.
- **Avoid hard, crunchy, sticky, spicy, and seeded foods.** No hard pretzels, chips, nuts, popcorn, caramel, taffy, or gum; avoid spicy foods and anything with seeds that could lodge in the surgical site.
- **No straws.** Suction can disturb the repair and the stitches. Drink from a cup instead.
- **Keep fluids up.** Drinking well matters more than eating a lot in the first several days.

03

Mouth care & oral hygiene

- **Do not brush the surgical site for six weeks.** Brush the rest of the teeth normally with a soft brush, carefully avoiding the repaired area.
- **Rinse after every meal and at bedtime.** Use the prescribed rinse or a half-strength, alcohol-free mouthwash, then swish with water — at least four times a day. Do not use Listerine or other alcohol-based rinses.
- **If chlorhexidine was prescribed,** use it exactly as directed, usually four times daily.
- **Rinse gently.** Let the rinse fall out of the mouth rather than forcefully spitting, which can pull on the repair.

04

Protecting the repair

- **Do not blow your nose.** The repair closes the opening between the mouth and the nose. Nose blowing puts pressure on it — sneeze with the mouth open instead. Ask us before using nasal sprays.
- **Keep fingers, utensils, and objects away from the site.** Do not probe the area with a tongue, finger, or toothbrush.
- **Do not wear an orthodontic appliance unless told to.** Your surgeon and orthodontist will tell you when braces, retainers, or expanders may be worn or adjusted again.
- **No smoking or vaping.** For older patients, tobacco and vaping significantly increase the risk of graft failure and infection.

05

If bone was taken from the hip (donor site)

- **This section applies only if a hip graft was used.** Most repairs use a bone graft substitute and have no hip incision at all. If that is the case for you, skip this section.
- **Keep the dressing dry and intact for 48 hours.** Sponge bathe only during this time. After 48 hours you may shower and remove the outer dressing; it does not need to be replaced. Leave any Steri-Strips to fall off on their own.
- **Expect bruising and soreness.** Bruising typically fades in 10–14 days. The hip may stay sore for a few weeks and is often the most uncomfortable part of recovery.
- **Expect a limp at first — but keep walking.** Most patients limp for several days. Walking short distances regularly helps recovery. No baths, swimming, or soaking until your surgeon says the site is healed.

06

Medicines & pain management

- **Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen** as directed by your surgeon for comfort and fever. These over-the-counter medicines are usually all that is needed. Follow the dosing on the label or from your provider exactly — do not take more, or more often, than directed.
- **Stay ahead of the discomfort.** Taking your medicine on schedule for the first few days, including a dose near bedtime, keeps you more comfortable.
- **Finish the full course of antibiotic** if one was prescribed, even once you feel well. Call us if it causes nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or a rash.
- **An ice pack may help the first two days.** Apply to the cheek for no more than 20 minutes at a time.

Activity, rest & follow-up

- **Plan a quiet week at home.** Rest for the first several days, then ease back into normal daily activity. Most patients return to school in about one to two weeks.
- **No contact sports, PE, or rough play for six weeks.** A blow to the face can damage the repair. Your surgeon will clear you before you return.
- **Sleep with your head slightly raised** for the first 48–72 hours to help facial swelling settle.
- **Your first follow-up is usually 2–3 weeks after surgery.** Please call the office to schedule. An X-ray is typically taken a few months later to check how the bone has filled in.
- **Orthodontic care continues after healing.** Teeth usually erupt into the grafted bone over the following year or two, and your orthodontist will plan treatment as they come in.

Additional instructions

Notes from your surgeon

When to call our office

- Fever over 101°F (38.3°C)
- Swelling that clearly worsens after 72 hours, or is red, hot, and tender
- Bleeding that soaks a washcloth in 1–2 hours
- Foul-smelling drainage, a bad taste, or graft material coming out of the gum
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash from the antibiotic, or trouble taking it
- If a hip graft was used: severe hip pain, or difficulty walking that does not improve within a week

Call our office at **973-360-1100**.

Call 911 for an emergency

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room immediately if your child has any of the following:

- Trouble breathing, gasping, or noisy or labored breathing
- Stops breathing, or lips or face turn blue or very pale
- Choking, or is unable to swallow
- Heavy bleeding that will not stop
- Unresponsive, difficult to wake, or unusually limp
- A seizure
- Swelling of the face, tongue, or throat, hives, or trouble breathing after a medicine (allergic reaction)
- Signs of severe dehydration — no wet diapers, no tears, sunken eyes, or extreme drowsiness
- A high fever with a stiff neck, severe drowsiness, or a rash that does not fade when pressed

Do not wait to call the office in a life-threatening emergency.