



# BE PROUD OF YOUR MOUTH

## CLEFT PROUD!

### WHAT ARE CLEFTS?

Clefts are openings or splits in the lip and/or roof of the mouth that occur when certain body parts and structures do not fuse together during fetal development. Globally, an estimated 1 out of every 700 babies is born with a cleft, making clefts one of the world's most common birth differences.

Without full treatment, which can include nutrition support, surgery, speech therapy, mental health care, and oral health care, children with clefts often struggle to eat, breathe, speak, and even survive.



### FACT

Globally, around 5 million people are living with untreated clefts, and an even greater number of people with clefts do not have access to high-quality oral health care.

### CLEFTS AND ORAL HEALTH: PREVENTION FIRST!

With or without treatment, children with clefts are at a greater risk of poor oral health, including tooth decay (dental caries), missing and misplaced teeth, and periodontal disease. Treating these conditions is often painful, expensive and, for many families, inaccessible, but prevention is low-cost, simple, and key to ensuring that children with clefts are able to thrive at every age - and that they can be proud of their mouth at every stage of cleft treatment.

A healthy smile at every age starts with good oral health habits from day one. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring good oral health for people with clefts!

## DENTAL CARE

All children, and especially children with clefts, need access to dental care to ensure a lifetime of happy smiles. This includes education about a healthy diet and the tools required for daily brushing, flossing, and rinsing. In addition, regular appointments with a dentist to maintain oral health and provide restorative care, when needed, are important.

Because children with clefts have unique oral health needs, it is important that they receive dental care services from professionals familiar with the condition and that caregivers are closely involved in their care!

## PRE-SURGICAL INFANT ORTHOPEDICS

Often referred to as PSIO or NAM (naso-alveolar molding), this treatment may be recommended for children who have moderate to severe cleft lips and/or palates because it has the potential to decrease the clefts' size and effects on the nose. If recommended by a surgeon and caregivers agree to the treatment, PSIO is applied when a child is one to six weeks of age and continues until primary cleft surgery is completed.



### FACT

**Children are not getting dental check-ups early enough. Tooth decay can start as soon as the first tooth appears in your child's mouth.**

PSIO, which is usually applied by an orthodontist, may include taping across the lip, a palate obturator, and/or a device to lift and remodel the cleft-affected nose. Caregivers should make daily adjustments at home and bring their child for follow-up care on a regular basis.

## ORTHODONTIC CARE

Children with clefts are often in need of orthodontic services. Cleft orthodontics is focused on aligning the teeth, monitoring facial growth, and the relations of the jaws and alignment of the teeth. It may be required at various stages of development and based on the surgical procedures that the child may need, such as a bone graft or jaw surgery. It is also important to note that many experts recommend liquid diets during and after orthodontics and surgery.

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