

Feeding Article from our Newsletter in August 2007

Let's look at bottle feeding a cleft baby. Thanks to Lucy, our Equipment Coordinator for putting this together.

As many of you already know, my Emily had a soft and hard palate which didn't allow me to breastfeed her. Undeterred I tried the breastpump, but after two weeks I was exhausted and so reluctantly I moved her onto formula. I used a bottle similar to the Queensland variety that CleftPALS sells. I went through a load of different teats until I found one that suited Emily the best which happened to be the silicone NUK fast flow teat. At CleftPALS we sell the Pur silicone fast flow teat which works just as well. It takes time to get the hang of squeezing the bottle – not too little or you risk a screaming baby and not too much or the milk floods everywhere! For new parents I would say that within a few weeks feeding the baby will become second nature and you will be able to pass on your new skills to the grandparents so you can have a break!

Now I never used a bottle with a spoon attached for Emily so for this section I have gathered some advice from our Contact Parents. Usually spoon feeding would begin about 3 weeks before the baby's operation – be that lip or palate, so that the baby is not distressed by a new method of feeding as well as having to deal with their repaired lip or palate. Spoon feeding continues for about 3 weeks afterwards though the surgeon will advise on this.

After the baby's operation their arms will be in splints making it very difficult to change their clothes if they spill lots of milk so a good idea is to use plenty of plastic backed bibs to catch dripping milk and save yourself the hassle of removing splints and putting them back on again. Another mess saving idea is to feed baby in a Frazer chair or high chair as this gives you two free hands to control the feeding.

The 'official' method of feeding baby with a spoon bottle (pigeon bottle) is detailed in the booklet given to new parents at PMH and again practice will make perfect with your feeding technique. Our CleftPALS morning teas are the ideal place to gain hints on feeding and pre and post operative advice from our Contact Parents.

CleftPALS also sells the Haberman Special Feeder bottles that babies may need if they have particular feeding difficulties. The nurses at PMH will show you how to work them and then it's a matter of practice! One thing to note is the bottle becomes faster and faster after each use and to always check the teat before feeding.

One question I am often asked as Equipment Coordinator is "how many bottles and which ones should I buy?" The Queensland bottles do not have a spoon attachment so they can only be used with a teat. The Pigeon bottles on the other hand come with a spoon but can also be used with a teat. Many parents choose just to buy the Pigeon and keep the spoons to one side for operation time. Others choose to buy a few of each bottle.

Please remember that if you are having difficulties with feeding your baby seek medical advice.