



Health and
Social Care



So...You're having an Alveolar Bone Graft (ABG)

Everything you need to know – a guide for children

The Regional Cleft Surgical Service for Northern Ireland

What is an Alveolar Bone Graft?

A bone graft is an operation where a surgeon moves a bit of bone to a different place. In an Alveolar Bone Graft (ABG for short), a surgeon takes a small bit of bone out of your hip, and puts it in your gum. 'Alveolar' just means gum.

Bone is taken from your hip...

...and put into your gum

Why do I need an ABG?

Lots of children born with a gap (called a 'cleft') in their lip or palate also have a gap in their gum. You might be able to see this, or feel it with your tongue.

This gap can be a problem for some of your adult teeth, as they need gum to grow into. The ABG closes the gap in the gum so your teeth can grow through. If you have a hole between your mouth and nose, it may help close this too.



When will I have my ABG?

The best time for an ABG is **different for every child**. But it usually happens between 8 to 11 years old, or when you get your front adult teeth.



The ABG will close the gap in your gum!

You will find out when you need your ABG at a hospital appointment. After this, your adult(s) will get a letter saying when your ABG is. You can write this on the back page to remind you.

Before your ABG, you need to **keep your teeth very clean!** Sometimes, an orthodontist (a type of dentist) will put a **metal or plastic**



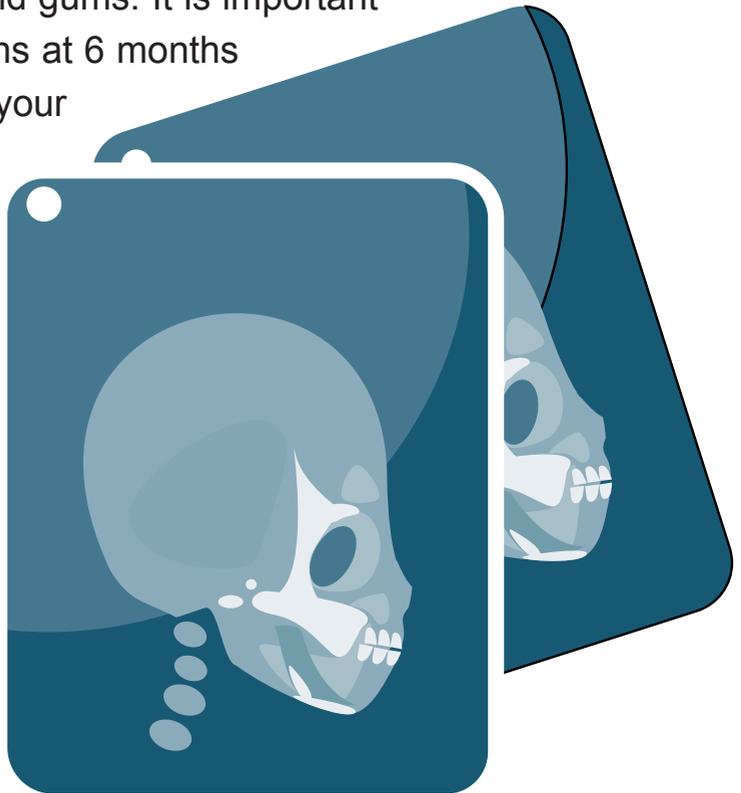
'brace' on your teeth to make your ABG easier. This is usually worn for a few months before and after your ABG. If you have speech therapy, it may stop for a bit.



How will I know if I need to wear a brace?

You will find out if you need to wear a brace whenever you meet both the orthodontist and the surgeon at a special clinic before your ABG. They may ask for you to have some special x-rays (pictures) taken of your teeth and gums and then they will let you know if you need to wear a brace.

After you have your ABG, you will come along to the same clinic and the team will take new x-rays (pictures) of your teeth and gums. It is important that this happens at 6 months after you have your ABG as this will allow the team to see how successful the operation went.



Where will my ABG happen?

Your ABG will happen in the Ulster Hospital Dundonald, which is in Belfast. There are lots of fun things here—even a play room full of toys, we have also games and Nintendo switch too!

When you have your ABG, you will stay in a place called Craig Ward. This is usually just for 1 or 2 nights. There will be other children you can talk to, they will be having other types of surgery.

To help you feel at home, an adult can stay next to you. You can also bring a few toys, or borrow some from the play team on the ward.

To find out more about the hospital, you can visit the



website with your adult(s), or write down questions for your adult(s) to ask the nurses. And if you like, you can ask the surgeon if they can organise a visit to the ward to meet the nurses and see the hospital.

What happens once I'm in hospital?

When you go to hospital, you will go straight to Craig Ward. The nurses will tell you how long you have to wait until your ABG.



You're not allowed to eat for a few hours before your ABG. Make sure you eat and drink plenty before you go to bed the night before.

Keeping busy can help if you are hungry or worried. To make your stay fun, the play team have toys and games, and most rooms have TVs (with games on!).

You will also have a special spray or cream put on the back of your hand or arm. It makes the skin so numb you can't feel it! This lets the nurses put a tiny tube in your hand to give you medicine.



You can also ask the surgeon which side of your hip you will have your scar on. The scar will be there forever, but fades over time. It will only be 3 to 5cm long, and is easily covered by underwear.

What happens when the wait is over?



When you are ready, you will ride (in your wheelie bed!) to a room with lots of machines in it. Here, the sleep doctors will give you some medicine. It

will put you in a very deep sleep.

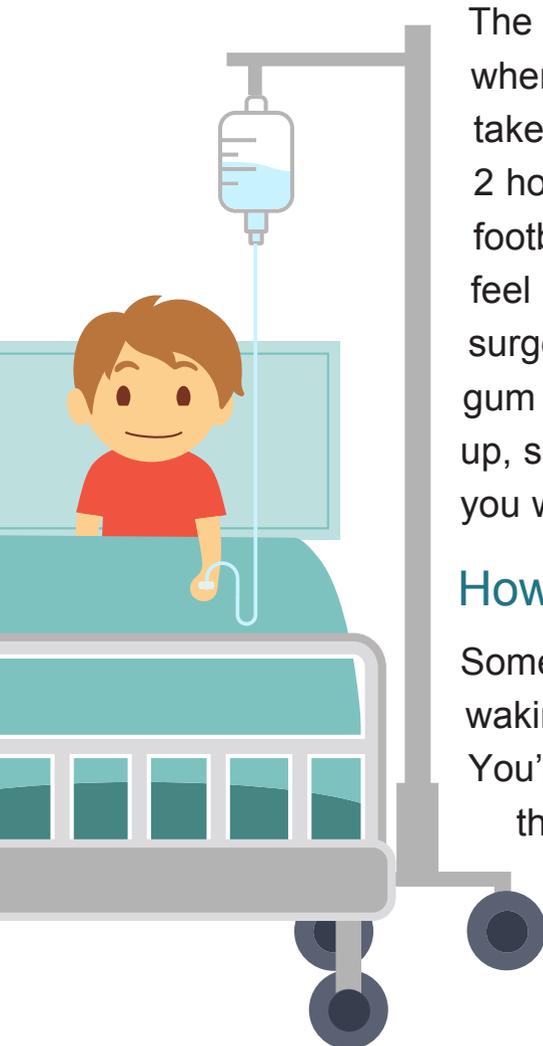
You can take the medicine either through a mask (which some people say smells like rubber or felt tip pens), or through the tube in your hand. An adult can be with you, if you like.

The medicine makes your eyes feel very heavy, and you'll soon be fast asleep. This means you won't feel or remember any of your ABG!



What happens during the ABG?

First, the surgeon takes a coin-sized bit of soft, spongy bone out of your hipbone (don't worry, it grows back!). They put this in the gap in your gum. Then they close it up with special stitches that fall out when you're healed.



The surgeons are very careful when they do this. It usually takes about 1 and a half to 2 hours – about as long as a football game. But you won't feel or remember any of it! The surgeon will numb your hip and gum to freeze it before you wake up, so you don't feel a thing when you wake up.

How will I feel afterwards?

Some children feel sick or dizzy waking up, but the nurses help! You'll have a tube of water in the back of your hand so you don't get thirsty.

Your mouth may look or feel swollen, so talking might feel odd. It will feel numb too from the freeze, be careful not to bite your lip. You will have special ‘stitches’ in your mouth which will dissolve away. Your hip may feel slightly sore, but don’t worry – you’ll look and feel back to normal soon!

You’ll get medicine to stay comfy, and should be home in a night or two. The stitches will fall out when they are ready. After a week or two off school and lots of rest, you should feel fine!

What can I eat afterwards?

You probably won’t want to eat very much at first. But when you do, you will only be allowed soft foods like soup, mash or ice cream. Use the space on the back to list soft foods you like!



What do I need to do once I'm home?

Once home, you need to brush your teeth, your gum and your stiches (being gentle around the stiches) and use special mouthwash. It is very important to keep your mouth clean. The stiches are blue in colour, and the surgeon will know if you have brushed your teeth, because if you don't they turn white!

You'll need to rest from exercise for 4 weeks, and rest from contact sports (like rugby or karate) for 8 weeks. Be sure to think of fun things to do instead!



What if I feel worried?

Most people feel a bit worried about going to hospital. This is totally normal! If you are worried about having your ABG, tell your adult(s). They can answer your questions or find out things you're not sure about.

If you are very worried, your adult(s) can ask someone from the hospital to chat to you to help you feel better. There are people who can talk and play with you, to help you feel less worried about your ABG.



