

Tongue Exercises

When a baby has a tongue tie, the range of tongue movement is the most important factor in the ability to breastfeed successfully. If movement is restricted due to a short or tight frenulum, tongue exercises may help to improve tongue mobility and facilitate an efficient suckling technique.

Getting started

Please ensure your hands are clean and your fingernails are short and filed.

Your baby should be in a quiet, alert or early active state so the exercises can be enjoyed and your baby can participate.

The exercises should be in a predictable sequence (i.e. Moving on when your baby is showing signs of anticipation of what's coming next).

If the exercise is rejected by your baby, or being ineffective, then a different exercise should be used.

Tongue Massage

For babies who find it difficult to bring their Tongue forward, (as with tongue tie). Or when the tongue tends to hump up in the middle. This may be useful prior to feeding.

- . Stimulate the area above the top lip to encourage your baby to open his/her mouth.
- . Place your finger pad side up in your baby's mouth to encourage sucking.
- . Gently turn your finger over and press down on the tongue, massaging in small circular motions. (Turn your finger back over if your baby tries to suck - to be soft on the palate).
- . Continue to gently massage the tongue forward by increasing circular movements towards the front of the tongue.

Press-down exercise

An exercise for babies who elevate the posterior part of their tongue (as with tongue tie) but do not like having a finger in the mouth.

- . Use your fingertip to touch your baby's chin, nose and area between top lip and nose (philtrum).
- . When your baby opens the mouth in response, apply brief pressure to the humped area of the tongue and then withdraw quickly.

- . Make silly sounds as you do this to make it fun and predictable, as well as smiling and making eye contact with your baby.
- . Stop when your baby does not want to open the mouth.

A Tongue Tie Division is the procedure to release a tight frenulum in order to facilitate good tongue movement. After a tongue tie has been divided, a baby might need help to improve the extension and lateral movement of his/her tongue.

Post Tongue Tie Division Exercises (as well as the above exercises)

- . Stimulate the area above your baby's top lip to encourage him/her to open the mouth. When the mouth opens place your fingertip on the centre of the outside of the lower gum ridge.
- . Maintain contact with the gum and slide your finger round to one side.
- . Lift your finger off and return to the central position. Repeat this three times to the same area.
- . Repeat this to the other areas of the mouth, working on the lower gums first. The repetitions give your baby a chance to follow your finger with his/her tongue.

Tongue Exercises Adapted from:

Watson Genna, C. (2013) *Supporting sucking skills in breastfeeding infants*. 2nd ed. Massachusetts. Jones and Bartlett Learning.

Some useful research links regarding tongue tie in babies:-

www.nice.org.uk

<http://nursingnurture.co.uk/user/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/tongue-tie-booklet.pdf>

<http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Parents/Problems/Tongue-Tie/Locations-where-tongue-tie-can-be-divided/>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-health/3353116/Breastfeeding-The-kindest-cut-of-all.html>

<http://www.tongue-tie.org.uk/index.html>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/21608523/?i=4&from=/15953321/related>