

Patient information factsheet

Frenulotomy (tongue-tie release) exercises

We have given you this factsheet because your baby has had or is due to have a frenulotomy (a small procedure to release a tongue-tie). It contains a series of gentle tongue exercises to perform at home, before and after your baby's frenulotomy. We hope this factsheet will answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your midwife, health visitor or a member of our infant feeding team.

How will tongue exercises help my baby?

After a frenulotomy, your baby will be able to move their tongue more easily, but this may not happen automatically. Tongue exercises encourage your baby to move their tongue, which can help them:

- get used to their 'new' tongue
- relearn normal tongue movement
- strengthen their tongue muscle and improve their feeding technique

The exercises may also prevent scar tissue developing, and the need for a second frenulotomy.

When should the tongue exercises be performed?

We recommend beginning these tongue exercises before your baby's frenulotomy, if possible. This will help your baby to relax their facial muscles and prepare them for what to expect after the frenulotomy.

We also recommend performing the exercises before or halfway through a feed.

You may find it helpful to sing a short song while performing each exercise. This helps your baby to anticipate the next exercise, which may make them feel more at ease. It is important that you are consistent with this, so that your baby associates the song with the exercise and knows what is coming next.

How often should the tongue exercises be performed?

Aim to perform each exercise a couple of times, two to three times a day for a few weeks or until your baby's feeding technique has improved.

Will the exercises hurt my baby?

All the exercises should be enjoyable for your baby. However, your baby may only tolerate these exercises for a very short period of time at first. Stop performing the exercises if your baby becomes upset or shows signs that they are not happy to continue. After a short while, try again.

Try to remain relaxed when carrying out these exercises, as this will help your baby to relax too. Skin-to-skin contact (holding your baby against your bare skin) will help to keep you both calm during the exercises. It will also encourage your baby to feed and use their tongue.

How to perform the tongue exercises

1. Wash your hands thoroughly before performing the exercises (you may wish to wear gloves).
2. Gently place your baby in a comfortable position on your lap or on a soft surface. Make sure their head is in a neutral position and not tipped back too far.
3. Softly stroke your baby's lips with your index finger. Then tap their top lip and wait for them to open their mouth.
4. Lightly touch and massage the tip of your baby's tongue and lower lip with your finger to encourage them to stick out their tongue. You may find it helpful to poke your tongue out at the same time to encourage your baby to copy you.
5. Move your finger to the back of your baby's lower gum on each side, while tickling their tongue at the same time. This will encourage your baby to move their tongue to the side. Then gently rub their upper and lower gums with your finger as though you are brushing their teeth.
6. Place your finger on the tip of your baby's tongue and press gently back. Allow them to draw your finger into their mouth.
7. When your baby begins to suck on your finger, gently pull your finger slightly out of their mouth until they nearly let go and then let them suck your finger back in, as though playing tug of war.
8. If you notice that your baby humps the back of their tongue during feeds, try gently pressing down on the middle of their tongue when they open their mouth. Doing this in a fun, consistent way can sometimes help.
9. Lightly pull down your baby's chin while they are sucking your finger to see how firm their sucking action is. This should gradually improve over time. Gentle chin support while you are feeding can also help to improve your baby's attachment during a feed.
10. Gently stroke the sides of your baby's tongue from back to front with your thumb and index finger, pushing the sides slightly in towards the centre of their tongue. This is called a bilateral tongue hug with compression. This is done to stimulate the cupping of the tongue with the nipple or teat in the mouth.
11. Place your thumb inside your baby's mouth, with your fingers on the outside, and gently stroke and massage their cheeks using a pinching action to relax their muscles.
12. For babies with an oversensitive gag reflex, gently touch the roof of your baby's mouth (their palate). If your baby gags, stop immediately. You may need to gradually build up to this exercise. You can also stroke the roof of their mouth from side to side.
13. Finish the exercises by stroking your baby's upper lip from the corner of their mouth to the centre.

Gently stroking or massaging your baby's face after you have finished the exercises can help improve their facial muscle tone. Skin-to-skin contact during or just after the exercises may also be helpful, as it will help you and your baby to relax and may encourage your baby to feed.

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Contact us

If you and your baby are being cared for by Southampton midwifery or health visiting services and you need feeding support or advice about your baby's tongue-tie, frenulotomy or the exercises recommended for your baby, please contact:

Maternity infant feeding team

Telephone: **07786 267584**

If the team are unable to answer your call, please leave a voicemail with your name, number and a short message, and a member of the team will aim to get back to you within 48 hours.

Community midwifery co-ordinator

Telephone: **023 8120 4871** (Monday to Sunday, 8am to 5pm)

Broadlands Birth Centre

Telephone: **023 8120 6012** (out of hours)

Your health visitor (use the contact details you have been given)

If you and your baby are being cared for by a midwifery or health visiting team outside of Southampton, please speak to your midwife, health visitor or general practitioner (GP), and ask for more information about support services in your area.

Useful links

www.uhs.nhs.uk/OurServices/Maternityservices/Feeding-your-baby/Feedingyourbaby.aspx

www.uhs.nhs.uk/departments/maternity-services/feeding-your-baby/tongue-tie

www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-visitors/southampton-childrens-hospital/childrens-services/tongue-tie

www.tongue-tie.org.uk

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**