

Care of Your Child After Tongue-Tie/Lip-Tie Release

Your child has had their tongue-tie and/or lip-tie released, so what now? It is important to understand that depending on your child's age and the type of tie(s) your child had, improvement may not be immediate. It can take some time for your child to learn how to use their tongue in an effective manner.

Pain relief: Most babies appear to experience only minimal discomfort for the first 24-48 hrs after the procedure, and breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact provide natural pain relief. If your baby seems uncomfortable, Tylenol (acetaminophen) can be given to help with the discomfort. Please note that ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) should NOT be used for babies under the age of two months. Please speak to your doctor/dentist/pharmacist if you are unsure about what dose of medication to give, and remember that medication dosages should always be based on your baby's weight. Many mothers find homeopathy to be effective as another option for pain relief. It is best to consult a homeopath to determine which remedies are right for your child. Please note that products containing benzocaine (i.e. baby orajel) should not be used due to health risks (FDA)

Note: You may notice some dark streaks of blood in your baby's diaper in the 24 hrs after the procedure. This is from the small amount of blood that your baby may swallow during the procedure, and it is not a cause for concern. If you are noticing blood in your baby's diaper and it persists for more than 24hrs after the procedure, or you are concerned, then contact your doctor. If a laser or electrocautery tool was used for the procedure, you may notice small burns on your child's lips or tongue (small white areas). Although every effort is made to ensure that this does not happen, the potential for these small burns is unavoidable since babies don't understand the need to stay still during the procedure. These burns heal quickly and don't cause any lasting damage.

Some babies will refuse to feed for a short period of time in the first 24 hrs after the procedure. This is usually due to discomfort and resolves with adequate pain management. There is usually no need for supplementation, but if you are concerned then please contact your lactation consultant or doctor.

Stretching exercises: Your baby's mouth heals quickly, and stretching exercises appear to be important after the procedure to make sure that the area that was released doesn't heal back together. Research on stretching is limited however clinical evidence supports the stretching exercises which are considered current best practice. Doing the exercises as instructed appears to reduce the risk of needing to have the procedure done a second time, and allows for proper healing. Before starting the exercises, make sure that your hands are clean, and your fingernails are short. We recommend that the stretching exercises be done 6 times a day starting at the 2nd feeding after the procedure. It is not necessary to wake your baby to do the stretching, however doing the stretches at least once during the night seems to help prevent reattachment. Continue the exercises for 7-10 days after the procedure. For some babies, healing may take a little longer, so if you stop the stretching exercises and breastfeeding becomes uncomfortable again, resume the stretching exercises for another few days. (C. Watson Genna, personal communication, June 17, 2011). Your baby may cry or fuss during the exercises but should calm down quickly after the stretches are done. Stretching can be done before or between feedings, depending on what works best for your baby.

To do the exercises, lay your baby on his back with his head towards you, and feet pointing away from you. Place your index fingers under your baby's tongue on either side of the incision. Lift your baby's tongue so that you can see the diamond shaped area where the release was made. You can also pull your fingers apart slightly to stretch the opening in all directions. Stretching should be done quickly and only needs to be held for 3 – 5 seconds. There may be a few drops of blood as the area stretches but this is normal. If bleeding is more than a few drops, or you are concerned, then contact your health care provider. To prevent the lip from reattaching grasp it and pull out and up (or down if it is the bottom lip), holding the stretch for 3 -5 seconds. Do this each time you stretch the tongue.

Some practitioners recommend adding in gentle massage of the surgical sites along with the stretching exercises. We encourage parents to wait at least 24hrs before starting massage to minimize discomfort for the baby.

Encouraging Effective Sucking: Breastfeeding is the most effective exercise for encouraging effective sucking. For breastfeeding babies under the age of 3 months, sucking issues related to tongue-tie often resolve after the tongue-tie is released, with no other intervention needed other than good knowledgeable breastfeeding support.

For some babies, further support in the form of gentle bodywork may be necessary to support effective sucking. Tongue-tied babies often develop adaptations to cope with their restricted tongue function and these adaptations can continue to cause sucking issues even after the tongue-tie is released. Gentle bodywork can help your baby to release these adaptations and learn to suck effectively. Examples of bodywork include craniosacral therapy, osteopathy, chiropractic care, physiotherapy, or massage therapy. It is important to find a practitioner who is knowledgeable and experienced with babies. Speak to your IBCLC (Lactation Consultant) for a recommendation of someone in your area.

If breastfeeding has not greatly improved by about a week after the procedure there are other exercises that can be done to help encourage your baby to use his/her tongue effectively. These exercises should be tailored to your baby's specific needs with the help of an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). If your baby is being supplemented and is using a bottle, it is important to speak to your IBCLC about how to use the bottle correctly in order to support effective sucking.

Please call your International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), or speak to your baby's Health Care Provider/Dentist if you have questions or concerns about how your baby's tongue is healing or if feeding is not improving.

To find an IBCLC in your area, you can search on the International Lactation Consultants Association (ILCA) website: www.ilca.org

References:

Hazelbaker, A. K. (2010). Tongue-tie: Morphogenesis, impact, assessment and treatment. Columbus, OH: Aidan and Éva Press.

Watson Genna, C. (2008). Supporting sucking skills in breastfeeding infants. Sudbury, MA.: Jones and Bartlett.

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