



What is a Tongue-Tie?

Tongue-tie (ankyloglossia) is a condition that is present at birth. It is when the piece of skin that attaches the bottom of the tongue to the floor of the mouth is unusually short, thick, or tight. This piece of skin is called the lingual frenulum. Sometimes tongue-tie is minor and does not cause problems. Other times, tongue-tie can make breastfeeding hard. This is because it can decrease the tongue's range of motion. Tongue-tie can also affect a baby's oral development, as well as the way the baby eats, speaks, and swallows.

Anterior tongue-ties are found near the front of the tongue and are usually easy to see. Posterior tongue-ties are usually further back and are harder to see. They are also often thicker. Lip ties are when the tissue behind the upper lip (also called a frenulum) is too thick, reducing movement of the upper lip.

Information in this resource is drawn from the following sources:

CADTH — *Frenectomy Techniques for Infants with Tongue and Lip Tie: Clinical Effectiveness* (2019)

CADTH — *Tongue and Lip Tie Cutting for Posterior Tongue Tie and Lip Tie: Clinical Effectiveness* (2019)

Canadian Paediatric Society — *Position Statement: Ankyloglossia and breastfeeding* (2018)

CADTH — *Ankyloglossia Diagnosis and Treatment in Canada: An Environmental Scan* (2018)

CADTH — *Frenectomy for the Correction of Ankyloglossia: A Review of Clinical Effectiveness and Guidelines* (2016)

Canadian Breastfeeding Foundation: *Ankyloglossia or tongue-tie* (2009)

The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine — *Protocol #11: Guidelines for the evaluation and management of neonatal ankyloglossia and its complications in the breastfeeding dyad* (2004)

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Tongue-Tie: How It May Affect Breastfeeding and When to Seek Care





Signs Your Baby Might Have a Tongue-Tie

- The tip of the baby's tongue looks notched or heart-shaped
- The baby cannot stick the tongue out past the lower lip
- Someone else in the family has tongue-tie (tongue-tie can run in families)
- The baby has a hard time latching onto or staying on the breast
- The baby takes a long time to feed
- The baby is not gaining weight as expected
- Mom's nipples are sore
- Mom's milk supply is low

The breastfeeding challenges just listed *may* be caused by a tongue-tie. They may also be caused by other things.

If you think your baby has a tongue-tie, it is important that your baby be examined by a qualified professional such as a pediatrician, a midwife, a lactation consultant, a dentist, or a speech therapist. They will do an assessment and talk to you about options for care.



What Are the Options for Tongue-Tie Treatment?

Frenotomy

Babies who are having trouble breastfeeding may benefit from a procedure called a *frenotomy* (also known as *frenectomy* or *frenulotomy*). This is a simple procedure where the tongue-tie is cut with a laser, scalpel, or surgical scissors. It is currently unknown which technique is better.

The procedure is usually done in the office, and usually only takes a couple of seconds. Sometimes pain medication (such as Tylenol) and a local anesthetic on the tongue-tie area are used. Your health care provider will go over exactly what to expect for your baby.

Overall, treatment for tongue-tie is low risk. Complications such as bleeding, infection, or the need for a repeat procedure are uncommon.

Sometimes mouth exercises and massage are recommended after a frenotomy. The benefits and risks of mouth exercises are not known because evidence is lacking.

Breastfeeding may improve right away, or it may take weeks to see an improvement.

No Treatment

Another option for tongue-tie is to not have a procedure done. Instead, you may get breastfeeding education and support.

Craniosacral Therapy

Craniosacral therapy — also called body movement — is sometimes suggested to help babies with tongue-tie. Body movement should always be done by a qualified professional. There is currently no evidence that this treatment works or does not work. More research is needed.

Treatment for Lip-Tie

There is not enough evidence to say which patients may be helped by lip-tie release, and under what situations. More research is needed.

When Does Tongue-Tie Require Treatment?

The Canadian Paediatric Society says that, in most cases, tongue-ties have no significant impact on the quality of breastfeeding. Treatment is not necessary unless there is difficulty breastfeeding or there are other concerns.

Who Can Perform Frenotomies?

In Canada, both doctors and dentists can perform frenotomies to treat tongue-ties. Other health professionals such as lactation consultants may be involved in assessing and referring patients.



Connect With a Health Care Provider

If you have breastfeeding concerns, connect with a health care provider.