

## Care of the Breastfed Baby After Tongue-Tie Release (frenotomy)

Your baby has had his/her tongue-tie released, so what now? It is important to understand that depending on the type of tongue-tie your baby had, improvement with breastfeeding may not be immediate. It can take a little bit of time for your baby to learn how to use his/her tongue in an effective manner.

**Pain relief:** Most babies experience only minimal discomfort after the procedure, and breastfeeding provides natural pain relief. If however, your baby seems uncomfortable Tylenol (acetaminophen) can be given to help with the discomfort. 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.

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.

**Stretching exercises:** Your baby's mouth heals quickly, and **stretching exercises are very important** after the procedure to make sure that the area that was released doesn't heal back together. Exercises should always be done when your baby is calm and alert, not tired or hungry. If your baby is resisting the exercises, then stop and try again later. Before starting the exercises, make sure that your hands are clean, and your fingernails are short.

Starting at the second feeding after the procedure, place your thumb and index finger under your baby's tongue on either side of the incision. Lift your baby's tongue while gently pushing back at the same time so that you can see the diamond shaped area where the cut was made, and hold it for 3 seconds. There may be a small amount of blood as the area stretches but this is normal. Do the stretching exercise 5-8 times a day for about a week 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).

**Encouraging Tongue Mobility: 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 spontaneously after the tongue-tie is released, with no other intervention needed.

If breastfeeding has not greatly improved by about day 5 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).

**Craniosacral Therapy:** Craniosacral therapy (CST) is a form of light touch therapy that can be very effective for many kinds of sucking issues, including helping a baby to learn how to nurse effectively after the release of a tongue-tie. If breastfeeding is not improving enough with good latch and positioning while nursing, CST may be beneficial. Speak to a local IBCLC or La Leche League Leader to find out if there is someone experienced in Pediatric CST in your area.

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](http://www.ilca.org)

La Leche League International: [www.llli.org](http://www.llli.org)

La Leche League Canada: [www.lllc.ca](http://www.lllc.ca)

#### **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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