

Maternity

Tongue-Tie and feeding your baby

What is tongue-tie?

A tongue-tie (also known as ankyloglossia) is where the membrane strip of skin connecting the baby's tongue to the bottom of their mouth is shorter, or tighter than normal. Some babies who have tongue-tie do not seem to be bothered by it. In others, it can restrict the tongue's movement, making it harder to breastfeed. Tongue-tie is sometimes diagnosed during a baby's newborn physical examination, but it's not always easy to spot. It may not be obvious until your baby has problems feeding.

Where the membrane is attached at, or close to the tongue tip, the tongue may look blunt, forked or heart shaped. However, a tongue-tie near the back of the tongue (posterior) may look normal because the membrane is attached further back. This can be detected by feel and a more detailed assessment of tongue function.

These photos show variation in appearance:



Anterior tongue-tie



Posterior tongue-tie

Image sourced from: Messner, Anna H., Cummings Otolaryngology: Head and Neck Surgery, 207, 3068-3075.e2 (Licenced by Elsevier ClinicalKey)



Patient Information

Signs of tongue-tie

To breastfeed successfully, a baby needs to latch on to both the breast tissue and nipple, and their tongue needs to cover the lower gum so the nipple is protected from damage.

Some babies with tongue-tie are not able to open their mouths wide enough to latch on to the breast properly.

If you're breastfeeding your baby and they have tongue-tie they may:

- have difficulty attaching to the breast or staying attached for a full feed
- feed for a long time, have a short break, then feed again
- be unsettled and seem to be hungry all the time
- not gain weight as quickly as they should
- make a "clicking" sound as they feed – this can also be a sign you need support with the positioning and attachment of your baby at the breast

Please note that there may be other reasons for feeding problems. It is therefore really important that you and your baby are assessed by a practitioner who is skilled in infant feeding support

Where can we get treatment?

Treatment for tongue-tie within the NHS is variable around the country. In this local area tongue-tie services are not available.

For further information please go to the Association of Tongue-tie Practitioners website www.tongue-tie.org.uk or the UK Baby Friendly Initiative website www.babyfriendly.org.uk for a list of centres that take NHS and private referrals.

The procedure to divide or release the tongue tie is called a frenulotomy. You should carefully check that the practitioner performing this procedure is a registered health professional with appropriate training and professional indemnity insurance.

Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this Information in another language or formats please contact 02476 967369 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

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