



What is a tongue-tie?

A tongue-tie (also known as ankyloglossia) is when the membrane under the tongue (the lingual frenulum) is shortened or tight and restricts tongue mobility. Where the frenulum is attached at, or close to the tongue tip, the tongue may look blunt, forked, or have a heart shaped appearance. Where the frenulum is attached further towards the base of the tongue the restriction may be more easily assessed by feel and a more detailed assessment of tongue function.

These photos show variations in appearance.



Image © Suzanne Barber RM IBCLC

Possible problems due to a tongue-tie restricting tongue mobility

- Mother**
- Sore, damaged, or bruised nipples
 - Misshapen or discoloured nipples after feeding
 - Engorgement / mastitis (from poor drainage)
 - Reduced milk supply because of poor drainage
 - Exhaustion from frequent feeding
 - Distress from failure to establish breastfeeding

- Baby**
- Restricted tongue and jaw mobility
 - Restless and unsettled feeds
 - Difficulty achieving and sustaining a deep attachment to the breast / bottle
 - Premature end of feed due to exhaustion
 - Frequent and / or very long feeds
 - Excessive early weight loss / poor or slow weight gain
 - Difficulty controlling milk flow, choking easily
 - Clicking noises while feeding, dribbling / spillage of milk
 - Colic, wind, hiccoughs or flatulence – caused by difficulty controlling milk flow
 - Difficulty with managing solid foods

Please note that you and your baby may not have all of these problems and there may be other reasons for the symptoms you are experiencing. It is therefore important that you and your baby are assessed by a practitioner who is skilled in infant feeding support. Many infant feeding issues can be resolved by adjustments to feeding techniques. Also, in addition to specialist feeding support, referral to bodyworkers (such as osteopaths or chiropractors) may help with other biomechanical issues that could be causing these problems.



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Information for parents and health professionals

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Treating tongue-tie by surgical release (frenulotomy)

If problems persist despite specialist support, then the tongue-tie can be surgically released to improve tongue mobility. This procedure is called a frenulotomy and is a simple surgical technique usually involving cutting the frenulum with sharp, blunt-ended scissors. Anaesthetic or stitching is not common practice, and the baby can feed straight after the procedure. Complications are very rare but include excessive bleeding, infection, damage to the tongue and surrounding structures and reformation of the frenulum or scar tissue that cause the need for another surgical release. Your tongue-tie practitioner will discuss all the risk factors with you so you can make an informed choice.



The baby is swaddled and the head is supported. The tongue is elevated to reveal and stretch the frenulum.



Sharp blunt-ended scissors are usually used to cut the frenulum. It is very quick and is unlikely to harm the tongue. Bleeding is usually minimal and stops quickly.



The baby is immediately offered a feed. A finger or pacifier to suck on can be offered if a feed is refused.



These pictures show the usual appearance of the normal and expected healing process.



Feeding may improve within a few days, but it may take longer for the baby to get used to the new function of the tongue. Further infant feeding support may be helpful.

Image © Carolyn Westcott RGN

Finding a tongue-tie practitioner

Provision of tongue-tie release within the NHS is variable around the country. Ask your healthcare professional or infant feeding supporter for details about what is provided locally to you.

Alternatively, please visit the ***“Find a tongue-tie practitioner page”*** on our website to find provision within the NHS or privately. <https://www.tongue-tie.org.uk/find-a-practitioner>

NB When parents are considering a frenulotomy, they are advised to check that the practitioner performing the procedure is a registered health care professional with appropriate training and professional indemnity insurance. Also, that they are regulated by the Care Quality Commission if in England, Health Improvement Scotland if in Scotland and The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority if in Northern Ireland. Practitioners providing frenulotomy in Wales are not required to be regulated by Healthcare Inspectorate Wales.

More information

Please see our website for more information and research in relation to infant tongue-tie.



<https://www.tongue-tie.org.uk/what-is-a-tongue-tie-restriction>
<https://www.tongue-tie.org.uk/research>