

Correcting your baby's tongue-tie

This leaflet explains about your child's tongue-tie and how we correct it. This leaflet only refers to the procedure concerning babies younger than three months of age. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us by email. Please refer to the Contact Us box at the end of this leaflet.

What is a tongue-tie?

Tongue-tie (also known as ankyloglossia) is the name given to the piece of skin between a baby's underside of tongue with the floor of the mouth. This piece of skin can restrict the movement of the tongue, and may lead to difficulties for the breastfeeding baby.

Tongue-tie can be described as being anterior or posterior. With anterior tongue-ties the tongue is held down all the way to the tip. These are usually very noticeable. Posterior tongue-ties are situated nearer to the base of the tongue, and are not as visible.

It has been reported that as many as one in ten babies may have a tongue-tie, and often there is a family history of tongue-tie.

Correction of tongue-tie is performed at the Evelina London Children's Hospital for those babies of mothers wanting to breastfeed.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The tip of the tongue may appear blunt or forked, or have a heart-shaped appearance, however it may not cause any problems, and nothing will need to be done.

For some breastfeeding babies the restricted movement of the tongue can interfere with latching on to the breast, and maintaining the attachment. This causes frequent, and sometimes long unsettled feeding, and ultimately poor weight gain. For the mother, this 'pinching' behaviour causes painful or damaged nipples, and sometimes blocked milk ducts or mastitis (painful and inflamed area of breast) as the milk isn't removed properly from the breast. This can be very painful, exhausting and distressing for the mother trying to establish breastfeeding.

Feeding difficulties can occur for many reasons, therefore it is important when considering treatment of tongue-tie that at least two feeding assessments are carried out by an experienced professional such as a midwife or infant feeding specialist.

How to get an appointment

If your baby is younger than three months

The Evelina London Children's Hospital will correct your baby's tongue-tie, by the procedure described in this leaflet, if your baby is younger than three months of age and has had two feeding assessments by your mid-wife or other health professional.

Your mid-wife or other health professional will refer you to our Tongue Tie Clinic. Our booking clerk will contact you and offer you an appointment.

Should you need to change your appointment, please contact the booking clerk (between Monday and Wednesday) on the contact details below:

t: 020 7188 9098 (option 6)

e: gst-tr.EvelinaTongueTieClinic@nhs.net

When a baby is born, they should be offered Vitamin K by health professionals, to help them clot their blood. It is important that babies having tongue-tie correction can clot blood so their tongues can heal.

If your baby is less than four weeks old and has not had Vitamin K, by mouth or by injection, you need to contact your GP. Your GP will have to arrange for your baby to have a blood test to check if they can clot their blood. An appointment for tongue-tie correction should not be booked until the results from this blood test are available.

What if my baby is older than three months?

If your baby is older than three months, please contact your baby's GP. They can refer your baby for tongue-tie correction at an appropriate hospital, after two feeding assessments.

Coming for the procedure

Your other children may accompany you to your baby's appointment, however, we have very limited room in the clinic so you will need to bring someone to care for them.

It is important you do not feed your baby for up to two hours before your appointment since we want your baby to feed immediately after the procedure.

Sometimes if a baby becomes very distressed due to hunger, they may be seen before another baby with an earlier appointment.

We will try to respect your wishes regarding privacy during breastfeeding, however, you will be sharing the room with other breastfeeding mothers.

The procedure

The tongue-tie can be separated in a quick procedure carried out by a consultant paediatric surgeon.

The procedure and potential risks will be discussed with you by the surgeon and we will obtain your consent (permission) before the procedure goes ahead.

The possible risks of the procedure include:

- a small amount of bleeding
- a short-term, intermediate infection
- the tongue-tie growing back.

You can stay and observe the procedure or wait outside the room.

Your baby will be wrapped-up and held in place by the nurse. The surgeon will separate the tongue-tie using a sterile pair of scissors. It only takes only a couple of minutes.

No pain relief (anaesthetic) is necessary.

After the procedure

Immediately after the procedure you will need to breastfeed your baby, and you will receive support, guidance and assistance from the midwife.

Breastfeeding immediately after the procedure is important since it:

- provides comfort and pain relief
- reduces bleeding by applying pressure to the wound
- protects against the small risk of infection.

Immediately following the procedure some mothers report a significant improvement in breastfeeding. Babies can be seen to move their tongues around, push them out, and have an improved latch. For some mothers this improvement will take several feeds, with the baby having to adjust their feeding technique with a more mobile tongue. Unfortunately, for some mothers there may be no improvement in breastfeeding.

Your baby's normal routine should be followed, and we strongly recommend that you seek support from your local breastfeeding support groups or from the person who referred you. You may receive a follow-up phone call from the midwife here at the clinic to ensure you are receiving this support.

There are generally no specific requirements following the procedure. In the case of a posterior tongue-tie, four days after the procedure, some surgeons may recommend you gently massage under the tongue with your finger once a day for four days to help prevent the tongue-tie forming again.

A small white/yellow spot often appears beneath the tongue within 24 hours of the procedure. This is part of the normal healing process, and will disappear in a few days.

The risk of infection is very small, however, please contact your GP, if your baby does suffer from the following in the first few days following the procedure:

- high temperature
- not feeding
- excessive dribbling
- pain

Does my baby need a follow-up appointment?

No follow up appointments should be necessary, however, if you have any further concerns please contact the Tongue-tie Team by email. Please see the Contact Us box at the end of this leaflet.

Useful sources of information

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

You can find breastfeeding groups in Lambeth and Southwark, plus lots of other helpful information on the Trust infant feeding web pages.

w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/maternity/care-during-pregnancy/preparing-for-your-baby.aspx

UK Baby Friendly Initiative

A website for healthcare professionals and parents providing information on maternity care and care for babies.

w: www.babyfriendly.org.uk

National Breastfeeding Helpline

An organisation advertising contact details, and times of availability, of highly-trained volunteers who are mums and have breastfed.

t: 03001000212 (9.30am-9.30pm)

w: www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk

The Breastfeeding Network (BfN)

An independent source of support and information for breastfeeding women and others.

w: www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

La Leche League (LLL)

A charity of volunteer breastfeeding counsellors that provide mother-to-mother support to all women who want to breastfeed.

t: 08451202918 (8.00am-10.00pm)

w: www.laleche.org.uk

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM)

A voluntary-sector provider of information on breastfeeding, weaning and related subjects for mothers and healthcare professionals. Breastfeeding counsellors also available.

t: 08704017711 (9.30am-10.30pm)

w: www.abm.me.uk

National Childbirth Trust (NCT)

A UK-based charitable organisation offering information and support in pregnancy, childbirth and early parenthood.

t: 08704017711 (8.00am-10.00pm)

w: www.nct.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Tongue-tie Team by email: gst-tr.EvelinaTongueTieClinic@nhs.net

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

t: 020 7188 3003 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

e: letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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