



**Bedfordshire
Community Health Services**

Tongue Tie - Advice for parents and carers of babies born with a tongue tie (Ankyloglossia) Speech and Language Therapy Service



What is a tongue tie?

Tongue tie is when movement of the tongue is restricted by an unusually thickened, tightened, or shortened frenum (the stringy tissue under the tongue). This can affect feeding, dental health and speech.

A tongue tie is not always identified at birth. Often the first sign of a problem is when the baby has difficulty latching on to the nipple when breastfeeding. Bottle feeding is rarely a problem.

Possible signs of a problem

- Poor latching during breastfeeding, leading to cracked nipple or mastitis.
- Clicking noises whilst feeding.
- Prolonged feeding.
- Falling asleep before completing a feed.
- Feeding every hour.
- Poor weight gain.

What you should look for

- The tongue may be heart shaped when pushed forward.
- The tongue may move downwards when pushed forward.
- Inability to curl the tongue towards nose or lick around lips.
- Curling up of tongue sides.
- Limited or sluggish movements of the tongue.
- The frenum is clearly visible.

Another way to see a tongue tie is to look in your baby's mouth when he or she cries. The tongue will draw back, showing the tight or short frenum. You can also see this when a toddler yawns.

Possible feeding difficulties when on solids

- Chokes on food
- Fussy eater / prefers soft food
- Slow eater
- Messy eater
- Requires a drink to help swallow food
- Difficulty licking an ice cream.

Teeth and oral hygiene

It is difficult for children with a tongue tie to remove food debris from around their teeth because of limited tongue movement.

This can lead to tooth decay and/or bad breath. It is, therefore, important to check round your child's mouth after eating. Tongue tie can also produce excessive dribbling and cause soreness around the mouth.

Speech

A tongue tie does not necessarily cause speech problems, but difficulty with co-ordination of tongue movements can cause unclear speech, especially when children start putting words together in sentences. Difficulty with 'l' is also common. However, there is no direct link between the severity of a tongue tie and speech difficulties and any such problems may be for other reasons.

Treating tongue tie

A tongue tie can be released (cut) from birth by a surgeon specialising in mouth and jaw problems. However, the surgeon needs to be sure that the tongue tie is causing problems. Poor latching whilst breastfeeding, for example, can be due to other factors such as positioning. You should first seek advice from a breastfeeding consultant or health visitor.

An older child with speech difficulties will require assessment by a speech and language therapist before being referred for this treatment. A dentist may be the first person to identify a tongue tie and can also refer for surgery. Tongue strengthening exercises may be needed after surgery.

Very young babies can have the tongue tie cut without anaesthetic. This is a quick and painless procedure, which is over in seconds. Older babies and children will need a short general anaesthetic, which is not usually advisable until the child is at least two years old. Occasionally, if the frenum is very thin and elastic, it will break and stretch by itself.

For further information about this service contact:

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your Speech and Language Therapist.

Information about the Speech and Language Therapy Service in Bedfordshire can be found at the following website address: www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/bedssl



If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any concerns about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on Freephone 0800 013 2511 or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.