

## Tongue Tie

### Parents and Carers Information



#### What is a tongue-tie?

A baby is described as having a tongue-tie when the baby's tongue is held to the floor of the mouth by a piece of tissue called a frenulum. Most of these pieces of tissue are very thin and contain no important blood vessels or nerves. Sometimes the frenulum prevents the baby from moving his or her tongue about easily. This can affect the way the baby feeds. Babies who are trying to breastfeed with a tongue tie sometimes have difficulty grasping sufficient breast tissue to feed properly. This means they are constantly hungry, do not put on weight well, and may need supplements of formula milk. Often the mother's nipples are made very sore. Bottle-fed babies can also have problems; they may dribble a lot and find difficulty forming a seal with their tongue around the bottle teat

#### Procedure

The treatment for tongue-tie is a simple procedure called Frenulotomy.

Not all babies and children with tongue-tie need treatment, some may be fine without it. National guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE guidelines) suggests that frenulotomy is usually safe for young babies and could help with breastfeeding problems.

Your baby will be seen at our clinic at St James Children Centre on the Wirral. Dividing your baby's tongue-tie does not need a general anaesthetic.

I prefer parents to stay present during the procedure as your familiar voice provides reassurance for your baby. However, you can wait in the waiting room until the procedure is complete, if you prefer not to be present.

I will swaddle your baby in their blanket, divide the tongue-tie, and apply pressure to the area using a piece of gauze immediately after the procedure, to stop any bleeding, which is usually very little. Most bleeding stops very quickly. I will then pass you your baby back quickly so that you can feed which helps minimise the bleeding. Breastfeeding itself produces its own pain killing substances for the baby.

## Are there any disadvantages?

It is unknown whether your baby will experience pain during the procedure. However, a significant number of small babies are asleep throughout the procedure. Older babies do not like being wrapped up so they usually cry out, and it can sometimes be really quite difficult to know whether or not dividing their tongue tie is actually painful, as they are already complaining at being wrapped up.

Following division, your baby is promptly unwrapped and handed back to you, and then either breast or bottle-fed. Some babies will cry for up to 60 seconds but some may not cry at all.

A few drops of blood are normal, but this always stops and is never a problem.

There will be a wound that you may feel needs something done about it. The inside of the mouth heals much faster than other areas of the body. It is normal for the lining of the mouth to continually be worn away and renewed. This happens even quicker in babies, so there is no need for any form of wound management. Merely, offer your baby a breastfeed every 2 -3 hours for the first 48 hours. Often there is a white patch under the tongue, which normally takes 24-48 hours to heal.

## Are there any complications?

In studies that have been examined by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), there was no report any problems after the procedure. Two studies that included a total of 159 babies found no problems after the procedure. In one study, 4 out of 215 babies had an ulcer under their tongue that lasted more than 48 hours. You may notice this as a tiny white area under the tongue for some days following the procedure, but this soon clears.

It is possible that the baby may develop an infection at the site of the snip and antibiotics are then needed. There have been occasional cases of hardened scar tissue, but these have got better without difficulty.

If the midwife thinks there is any danger of your baby bleeding from the snip she will not do the procedure.

## Are there any alternatives?

Some babies with a tongue-tie are able to feed well if their position at the breast is good. Your One to One Midwife and our Mammias (breastfeeding supporters) may be able to teach you how to help your baby get into a better position. Some babies with a tongue-tie, which is stopping them from feeding efficiently, will gradually improve their technique as they grow. However in the meantime they may be slow to gain weight and their mother's nipples may continue to be very sore. In older babies tongue-ties get torn as the baby starts to move around and put things in his mouth. This then prevents any further problems with feeding or with speech.

Snipping of the tongue-tie is not suitable within One to One Midwives in the following circumstances:

- **Your baby is over 6 months old;** Tongue-ties can be snipped over this age but an older baby may need a general anaesthetic.
- **Your baby is unwell;** although snipping a tongue-tie is a simple procedure with very few likely complications, an unwell baby may be more prone to an infection and will also be more distressed at unfamiliar handling.
- **There is a family history of bleeding disorders.** Although bleeding is minimal when a tongue-tie is snipped, any delay in clotting could mean the baby loses a significant amount of blood.
- **If there is an infection in your baby's mouth.** Your baby has an infection in the mouth; the snip could allow infection into the blood stream.
- **If the frenulum is thick** or has obvious blood vessels, or there are unusual structures under the tongue, the midwife would not want to damage these.

## Contact Details

You will receive on-going support from your One to One Midwife until any feeding issues have resolved.  
You can also contact:

Maternity Reception- 0330 300 9121 between 9am and 5pm, Mondays to Fridays

Michelle Ryan- Tongue Tie Divider- 07908146007

Breastfeeding supporters (MaMAs) Please ask your One to one Midwife to refer you.

## Useful Links

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM)

Tel: 0844 412 2949

Website: [www.abm.me.uk](http://www.abm.me.uk)

The National Childbirth Trust (NCT)

Tel: 0300 3300 771

Website: [www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

La Leche League

Tel: 0845 120 2918

Website: [www.laleche.org.uk](http://www.laleche.org.uk)

National Breastfeeding Helpline

Tel: 0300 100 0212

Website: [www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk](http://www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk)

Medela Breast Pump Hire

Tel: 0870 950 5994

Website: [www.medela.co.uk](http://www.medela.co.uk)