

What Is a Tongue Tie?

A tongue tie is a band of tissue underneath the tongue that may make it difficult for the tongue to move. However, every person has a band under the tongue that can be seen or felt and it does not always cause problems.

What Problems Can Be Caused by a Tongue Tie?

Tongue ties may make it difficult for a baby to latch onto the breast to breastfeed. This can make it hard for a baby to receive milk from the breast and may cause nipple pain for the parent. However, tongue tie is not the only reason a baby might have trouble feeding. In older children, a tongue tie may cause difficulty pronouncing certain sounds in speech. Tongue ties do not cause problems with sleep, breathing, reflux, or the growth of a child's face. In teenagers and adults, a tongue tie might make it difficult to play instruments, kiss, or lick ice cream.

Other ties are sometimes mentioned, including upper lip ties and cheek ties. These ties do not usually cause problems in feeding or speech.

What Is a Frenotomy?

A frenotomy is a procedure to cut a tongue tie. The baby's tongue is lifted up with a metal tool. Sharp scissors (or a laser) are used to cut through the tight band below the tongue. This will usually cause a diamond-shaped wound under the tongue that will slowly heal on its own. Sugar water can be used before the procedure to make it less painful for babies. Older children sometimes need to go to sleep for the procedure or have an injection of numbing medication to the area if they are able to stay awake.

What Are Benefits and Risks of Frenotomies?

Research shows cutting a tongue tie may improve pain with breastfeeding. A frenotomy might also improve a baby's tongue movement and help them to latch on to the breast more easily. Frenotomy may help move the tongue for speech or social reasons. Frenotomy may not fix the feeding or speech issues at all, or only partially. Sometimes more help is needed from specialists like speech-language pathologists.

Frenotomies may cause pain. Pain can make babies have trouble eating, usually for a short time. Frenotomies may also cause bleeding, infection, or injury to nerves and saliva ducts in the area. The tie may also come back from scarring. Burns are possible if a laser is used.

What Are the Alternatives?

Working with a lactation consultant and speech-language pathologist can be very helpful. Many children may not need to have sur-

Tongue tie is a thick band of tissue on the underside of the tongue that may make it difficult for the tongue to move. A band under the tongue does not always limit tongue movement or cause problems.

Tongue tie may cause challenges with breastfeeding in babies and rarely with speech in older children.

Some children may undergo frenotomy surgery to improve tongue movement. Pain management measures are taken, and sharp scissors or a laser are used to cut the tongue tie.



⊕ Surgery is not always necessary. Some children may be treated by working with a lactation consultant or with a speech-language pathologist.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

UpToDate Patient Education: Common Breastfeeding Problems (Beyond the Basics)
www.uptodate.com/contents/common-breastfeeding-problems-beyond-the-basics?

Tongue Tie in Infants and Young Children (HealthyChildren.org)
www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Tongue-Tie-Infants-Young-Children.

gery to treat a tongue tie. Speak to your doctor to help you decide what is best for your child.

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