

Division of your baby's tongue-tie

This leaflet explains about your baby's tongue-tie and how we divide it. This leaflet only refers to the procedure concerning babies 12 weeks and younger. If your baby is older than 12 weeks, please contact your baby's GP. They can refer your baby for tongue-tie division at an appropriate hospital.

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.

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.

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 effective milk transfer by restricting the attachment to the breast. This can cause frequent, and sometimes long unsettled feeding, and ultimately poor weight gain. The mother may experience, 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 a professional who has experience of assessing breastfeeding.

If it is difficult to meet all of your baby's needs with breastfeeding it is important to protect your supply with expressing. Hiring a hospital grade breast pump is usually the most effective way to protect your supply. Pumping at least eight times in 24 hours is important.

How do I get an appointment?

All the following need to be met:

- Your baby is 12 weeks and below
- Corrected gestational age of 37 weeks or above
- Your baby must be at least a week old
- Confirmed tongue tie following two assessments

- You are still experiencing feeding issues despite ongoing feeding support by an appropriately trained professional including peer supporters
- You intend to continue breastfeeding
- Your baby has received IM vitamin K or 3 oral doses.

When a baby is born they should be offered Vitamin K by health professionals to help their blood to clot. It is important that babies having tongue-tie division 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 and you have decided not to give them vitamin K, you need to contact your GP. Your GP will have to arrange for your baby to have a blood test to check if their blood can clot. An appointment for tongue-tie division should not be booked until the results from this blood test are available.

Please note we do not accept referrals on the basis of perceived future issues e.g. speech difficulties.

If you are exclusively bottle feeding and there are no concerns, you will not be offered an appointment as it is not indicated. This is an unnecessary procedure and if you are not breastfeeding there is an increased risk of reoccurrence.

You will receive a phone call offering you an appointment close to the time of the clinic. Letters are not sent because of the quick turn over of appointments in this clinic. Occasionally you may receive a text message if the appointment is within the next few days or we have been unable to contact you via phone. You will be allocated a slot and we aim for you to be seen within 30 minutes of this.

Should you need to change your appointment, please contact the booking clerk on the contact details: **t:** 020 7188 7188 ext 89098 option 7 or **e:** gst-tr.EvelinaTongueTieClinic@nhs.net

Coming for the procedure

It is important that 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.

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.

The procedure

The tongue-tie can be separated in a quick procedure carried out by a consultant paediatric surgeon. Please note that a full assessment will not be provided prior to the procedure as this should have been completed by the referring professional.

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
- no difference to feeding issues.

You can stay and observe the procedure or wait outside the room. Your baby will be wrapped-up and held by the nurse. The surgeon will separate the tongue-tie using a sterile pair of scissors. This procedure will take less than a minute.

No pain relief or (anaesthetic) is necessary.

After the procedure

Immediately after the procedure you will be taken to another room to breastfeed your baby, a midwife will be available to support and guide you with feeding. Once baby has fed, any bleeding should stop.

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. Please note the use of nipple shields can increase the risk of re-adhesion.

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. There are generally no specific requirements following the procedure. At present, there isn't strong enough evidence to suggest that post procedure massage (under the tongue) has any benefit, therefore we do not recommend this. Improving attachment at the breast will encourage movement of the tongue thereby reducing the chance of re-adhesion.

A small white/yellow spot often appears beneath the tongue within 48 hours of the procedure. This is part of the normal healing process, and will reduce ideally within 2 weeks.

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 at the site.

Bleeding after a full feed is unlikely, however in the event that active bleeding (not spotting) occurs at home, apply pressure to the wound site with your index finger. If this continues for more than 10 minutes, please attend your local Emergency Department (A&E).

Does my baby need a follow-up appointment?

No follow up appointments from the Evelina are necessary, however, your referrer should arrange to see you again post procedure and direct you to a local feeding group.

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:** gstt.nhs.uk/breastfeeding

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 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: **e:** 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, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm **e:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

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

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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 website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or **e:** patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 4153/VER3

Date published: October 2018

Review date: October 2021

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A list of sources is available on request