

**Te Whatu Ora**

**Health New Zealand**

Capital, Coast and Hutt Valley

**Hutt Maternity**

# Tongue Tie

Information on tongue tie (Anklyloglossia) in newborn babies

## What is it?

The underside of the tongue is tied to the floor of the mouth by a membrane (lingual frenulum).

In a tongue-tie the membrane is short and tight. This restricts the mobility of the tongue.

## How does this occur?

The frenulum is a piece of tissue that was part of the facial structure of the infant during early pregnancy.

This would usually disappear or reduce to a very slight membrane which is elastic and does not limit the tongue in its movement.

Many tongue-ties cause no problems.

Research shows up to 5% of babies have some form of tongue-tie. There may also be a family history.

## Difficulties Associated with Tongue-Tie

Babies with tongue-tie may have breastfeeding difficulties.

- Inability to latch adequately.
- Unable to stay fully latched.
- Poor breastmilk intake.
- Clicking sound while breastfeeding
- Poor growth

Mothers may experience:

- Nipples being grazed and/or damaged.
- Baby slipping off the nipple.
- Pain in nipples

This may result in poor milk supply and/or early weaning.

## Assessment and Treatment

Assessment is done by the Lactation Consultant following referral from staff or your LMC.

The Lactation Consultant will do a thorough assessment of your baby's mouth and observe a breastfeed.



If your baby has breastfeeding difficulties due to tongue-tie the Lactation Consultant may suggest a frenotomy.

The procedure of frenotomy is a simple surgical release of the frenulum using sterile scissors.

Many babies don't even cry when this is performed. Following this procedure you will be supported to latch and breastfeed your baby.

It is important to note not all tongue-ties need intervention, but all will need good lactation support. A follow on appointment may be given.

## References

Ingram J et Al (2019). The development and evaluation of a picture and assessment tool for tongue-tie in breastfed babies (TABBY). *International Breastfeeding Journal* 14, Article 13.

National Guidelines for Assessment, Diagnosis and Surgical Treatment of Tongue Tie in Breastfed Neonates (2020) [health.govt.nz](https://www.health.govt.nz)

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ipg149>

*For more information contact:*

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