

Tongue tie

Increasingly young babies are being referred with tongue ties. This undoubtedly is because of the encouragement of breast feeding. A tongue tie is perhaps one of the commonest causes of painful or inefficient breast feeding.

Correct identification of tongue ties allows for prompt treatment and often improves breast feeding. However many tongue ties might resolve spontaneously if allowed to, but this might involve alternative feeding with bottles.

A tongue tie is the persistence of a fold of pink tissue (mucosa) below the tip of the tongue in the midline (the frenulum). This will reduce the mobility of the tongue and particularly prevents tongue tip elevation, anchoring the tongue to the floor of the mouth. The tongue therefore might project less over the lower gum and the tip may be 'heartshaped' or indented where the tip is anchored to the floor of the mouth.



Anterior Tongue Tie

Most tongue ties are visible and are known as 'anterior tongue ties'. If required these can often be simply divided in clinic. This involves the surgeon cutting this fold and this is a simple quick procedure that can safely be performed in a few seconds without anaesthesia. It is not a significantly painful procedure and frees up the tongue instantly.

Tongue ties that persist, in addition to interfering with feeding, can spread the lower incisor teeth apart, contribute to speech problems and in teenage years cause embarrassment. Most tongue ties are thought to resolve and the indication for early division is usually feeding problems. However remember not all feeding problems are due to tongue ties.

A smaller number of children may have a 'posterior tongue tie'. This is where there may still be reduced tongue movement and feeding problems without an obvious persisting tongue frenulum (anterior tongue tie or fold of mucosa).

Posterior tongue ties are further back in the substance of the tongue. There are no specific easy diagnostic features but palpation of the tongue reveals if there is a tight or resistant area in the center of the tongue behind where a classic tongue tie lies. Posterior tongue ties are contentious and some may not even recognize

this condition. Posterior tongue ties can certainly be missed as they are less visible. This area can also be divided if the surgeon is confident of its existence. There might be a little more visible blood but this is still an outpatient type procedure.



Heart shaped tongue with a Posterior Tongue Tie