



## Suck-Strengthening Careplan

Suck-Strengthening Exercises can be done easily at home. Do each exercise several times a day. Enjoy doing it! It can be fun to watch the faces a baby makes! If she gags for any of these exercises, don't go into her mouth as deeply. Work slowly until she will take your finger in more deeply. You might find some of these exercises are easier between feedings, during alert times, or even just prior to feedings. Use your own judgement and do it when it works best for your baby.

- 1) **Gum Massage:** with a clean finger, and short nails, use the pad of your finger and gently rub baby's gums on bottom left, bottom right, across the bottom front. Then work on the upper gums in the same manner. Baby should be content when you do this, relaxing on your lap or in your arms. (This causes her to move her tongue around a lot, stretching it an exercising it.)
- 2) **Tug of War:** use a clean finger, and short nails, get baby to suck deeply on your finger, pad side UP to the roof of her mouth (most women can get the baby's lips as far onto their finger as the second/middle knuckle crease). When she is sucking good and well, gently try pulling your finger out. She should reflexively try to keep your finger in her mouth. Repeat: you pull it out, she sucks it back in. Use a finger, not a pacifier (it is too short and often not large enough). (This helps to strengthen the tongue's ability to "cup" the nipple.)
- 3) **Puckering:** with a clean finger, gently tickle the edges of her mouth to get her to pucker-up. Do both sides over and over. She may stick her tongue out, too. (This helps to strengthen the peri-oral muscles that assist with latch.)
- 4) **Tongue-Thrusting:** with a clean finger, gently tickle the bottom lip in the center. Baby should stick her tongue out/lick. (This helps to learn to extend the tongue.)
- 5) **Tongue-Walking:** with a clean finger, and short nails, allow baby to suck on your finger, pad side UP. Try to get her to suck your finger in fairly deep (most women can get the baby's lips as far onto their finger as the second/middle knuckle crease). IF you feel the back of her tongue elevated up, trying to push your finger out (opposed to cupping your finger, trying to keep it in) turn your finger over, pad side down and gently press down on the back of her tongue while she sucks. (This helps to get a tongue-humper to keep his/her tongue down and cupped and accommodate a nipple/finger deeper in the mouth.)

### **For babies who need extra milk volume for adequate weight gain:**

- 6) **At Breast Supplementation** (aka SNS or LactAid) uses a container of milk or formula connected to a very thin tube which can be placed in baby's mouth while she is suckling on mother's breast. Many babies improve their natural breastfeeding skills when they have a larger volume of milk available to them during the feeding (especially premature, weak or sleepy babies). There are a variety of these systems available, each with its own benefits. Using this system takes out one step of the "breastfeed, supplement, pump" cycle that many moms/babes are used to. This method can also eliminate "nipple confusion" which is often created by using even the slowest artificial teat.
- 7) **Special Needs Feeder** (aka Haberman feeder) is a special bottle & teat. It does not drip at all and will not flow unless baby sucks. There are 3 speeds/flow rates on the bottle teat (no/slow flow; medium flow; fast flow). It works like this: no/slow flow = lots of effort required; medium flow = medium effort required; fast flow = lowest effort required to get the milk out of the bottle/teat. The fastest flow on the Special Needs Feeder is still only as fast as the slowest bottles/teats on the commercial market (about 7-9ml/min). It can be used therapeutically to strengthen a suck if bottles are used, even if most feedings are with the breast (with/without an "at-breast supplementer"). We sell this bottle/feeder at the office. IF you choose to use this, you will find that it takes longer to finish a bottle. You can use the fast setting in the beginning of the feeding and slow her down as she gets into the feeding. All you do is simply turn the nipple (while it is in her mouth) and it gets slower. It is more "work" and, thusly, can be used to help strengthen a weak suck. If she is getting tired, or the feeding takes >30 minutes, you can turn it to the fastest flow rate as needed.

REMEMBER: a well-fed and healthy-weight baby will be a better breastfeeder! Sometimes, sheer weight gain, which deposits fat in the baby's cheeks and energy to baby's muscles, enhances breastfeeding abilities.

**If you have questions or desire to schedule an appointment with  
a Lactation Consultant, call 1-877-365-MAMA (6262).**

