

Tongue Exercises to Help Babies Learn to Use Their Tongues Correctly for Breastfeeding

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SPECIAL NOTE: Babies can be orally over-stimulated. If this happens, babies will refuse to take *anything* by mouth, including food. To be sure you don't over-stimulate your baby, choose only two of these exercises to do at a time. Do each of the two chosen exercises for only three reps. Later in the day, choose two different exercises and again limit them to three reps each. The next day, choose different exercises again during each of two exercise sessions. To summarize:

Each day: two exercise sessions

In each exercise session: do only two different exercises

For each chosen exercise: do only three reps

BEFORE EACH EXERCISE

Stimulate baby to open WIDE, by either tapping your fingertip gently between his upper lip and his nose, or by brushing your fingertip down across his lips in a nose-to-chin direction. Brush your fingertip in a downward direction ONLY, then pull fingertip away from baby's face, move up to his upper lip, and brush down again. Pause between downward strokes to give baby time to think about which muscles he needs to use to open his mouth wide.

Sometimes it is helpful to make a game out of it. With a big smile on your face, you might quickly tap baby's nose and say something like "Bip", then tap his chin and say "Boop", then tap his lips and say "Bop", then open your own mouth very wide. Repeat a few times, and often baby will begin to understand it's a game and be more willing to open his mouth when you touch his lips, so you can slide your finger in.

Side sweep

Use *pad* of finger.

Do NOT use downward pressure during strokes.

Stimulate the infant to open wide. Place pad of finger flat on the tongue, in midline. Pause. Then sweep the finger across the upper surface of the tongue from center to one side. Pause. Sweep finger back to center. Pause. Sweep finger to opposite side of tongue. Pause. Then sweep back to center. Pause. THIS IS ONE REPETITION. Repeat the entire cycle two more times, pausing between each section of the exercise. This stimulates the intrinsic muscle layer that runs from side to side in the tongue, which contracts to form the central groove that controls the milk in the baby's mouth so he doesn't cough and sputter.

(continued on reverse)

Slide back

Use finger*tip*.

Do NOT use downward pressure during strokes.

Stimulate the infant to open mouth wide. Place fingertip on tip of baby's tongue. Without any downward pressure, slide fingertip along the midline of the tongue, from tip to about halfway back. THIS IS ONE REPETITION. Pick up fingertip to move back to the tip of tongue. Do NOT slide finger along tongue when moving to the front of baby's mouth.

Stroking the tongue

Use finger*tip*.

Use gentle downward pressure at each point of the exercise.

This exercise supports central grooving and also helps reduce tongue retraction. Stimulate the infant to open wide. Place fingertip in the center of baby's tongue. (Fingertip should be halfway back on the tongue, and also centered when considering the distance side-to-side.) The fingertip is pressed down on the tongue in midline and slides along the tongue to the front of the mouth. The infant can be told "tongue down" while the stroke is occurring. THIS IS ONE REPETITION. Lift fingertip and again place it back on the center point of the tongue to repeat the exercise two more times. Do NOT slide the fingertip back into the mouth along the surface of the tongue. Only slide along the tongue when moving fingertip towards the front of the mouth.

Walking back on the tongue

Use finger*tip*.

Use gentle downward pressure at each point of the exercise

A mechanical vibrator or First Years vibrating teething toy may be used

This exercise stimulates wavelike tongue movements. Stimulate the infant to open wide. Place fingertip on tongue, just past the tongue tip. Wiggle finger in place to provide vibration to the tongue. OR hold vibrating toy in your hand while you do this exercise, so the vibration is transferred through your hand and finger to baby's tongue. Then slide finger back a few millimeters (about 1/8 inch) and repeat vibration. Repeat vibrations along midline of tongue approximately every 1/8 inch until you are about halfway back on the tongue. Stop before you reach a point that causes baby to gag. THIS IS ONE REPETITION. Repeat line of vibrations from tongue tip to halfway back on the tongue, two more times.

Wiggle Worm (suggested by Joan Dietrich Comrie, CCC-SLP)

Use *pad* of finger.

Use gentle downward pressure during this exercise.

This exercise also helps to stimulate wavelike tongue movements. Stimulate the infant to open wide. Place finger pad on top of baby's tongue, near the tip. Using gentle downward pressure, like kneading bread dough, stroke pad of finger from tongue tip back along the midline of tongue until the length of the first two finger joints is lying on baby's tongue. (Stop sooner if baby gags.) THIS IS ONE REPETITION. Lift finger so it is not touching tongue and move finger pad to the front of baby's tongue. Repeat exercise two more times.