



TEN STEP TUESDAY

# Neonatal Ankyloglossia & Breastfeeding

## It's Ten Step Tuesday!

Ankyloglossia, also known as tongue-tie or tight frenulum, is a congenital anomaly in which the inferior surface of the tongue is tethered to the floor of the mouth by the frenulum so that the tongue's range of motion is restricted. As much as 11% of newborns may have evidence of ankyloglossia (male > female).

### Ankyloglossia Symptoms

- None (may be asymptomatic)
- Poor latch
- Nipple pain and/or trauma
- Prolonged feeding sessions
- Sleeping at the breast
- Poor drainage of the breast/milk stasis
- Lack of infant satiety
- Poor weight gain
- Failure to thrive

### Neonatal Physical Exam Findings with Ankyloglossia

- Tongue extension restricted to alveolar ridge
- Limited elevation of tongue during crying
- Tip of tongue is notched or heart-shaped
- Frenulum is short and inelastic
- Tongue is attached close to or on the alveolar ridge

### Ankyloglossia Assessment

- Full evaluation of the breastfeeding dyad is essential.
- Ankyloglossia may be associated with no breastfeeding issues
- Better latch technique may be sufficient treatment
- May improve with time, especially with ample supply
- Multiple tools to score degree of restriction for neonatal ankyloglossia have been developed

[See an assessment being performed using the Hazelbaker tool \(ATLFF\).](#)

### Ankyloglossia Treatment – Frenotomy

- For symptomatic or more severe restriction with no improvement with quality lactation management, standard treatment is frenotomy (release of tethered tissue).
- Complete pre-procedure physical examination of the newborn by a pediatric care provider recommended to assess for other underlying neonatal diagnoses
- Can be done with scissors in office or hospital setting by trained providers
- Simple, low-risk procedure
- Some studies report immediate improvement in maternal pain
- Good follow up essential to assess for improvement in symptoms and milk transfer
- Risks: Risk of bleeding, hematoma formation, tissue damage or nerve injury with paresthesia or numbness of tongue (in a non-verbal neonate) with deep incision

Content from the AAP Breastfeeding Curriculum, Updated 2021



Image by Janelle Aby, MD: :  
<https://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/photo-gallery/mouth.html>

Restricted  
frenulum

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