

Tongue-tied

New parents should watch for ankyloglossia and decide if surgery is needed sooner than later

ANCHOR LEDE

New parents have a long list of things to watch to ensure their child is healthy and developing properly. More observations to add to the list: does the child's tongue look different? Is breastfeeding difficult? If either answer is yes, the culprit may be tongue-tie.

TAKE VO

Sarah Shoemaker, a midwife at OSF HealthCare, says tongue-tie occurs when the band of tissue between the bottom of the tongue and the bottom of the mouth is thicker, shorter, or covers a large portion of the tongue. This restricts the tongue's movement.

The procedure to fix tongue-tie is pretty simple, Shoemaker says. There's little blood loss, and it can be done in the hospital, at a pediatrician's office or at a pediatric dentist's office.

SOT

Sarah Shoemaker, APRN

OSF HealthCare certified nurse midwife

"They just lift the baby's tongue and, with sterile scissors, snip [the tissue]. Then, immediately breastfeed [or formula feed if that's what mom has chosen] because the tongue is free at that point. Some providers will teach exercises to do with the baby so [the tissue] doesn't heal back and have to be snipped again later." (:27)

VO TAG

Some cases of tongue-tie may be mild enough that parents opt to do nothing. In some cases, the frenulum will loosen over time. That approach is fine, Shoemaker says. But the decision should be made with the input of the child's care team, and it should be made sooner than later. That's because tongue-tie later in life can cause speech and eating issues, Shoemaker says, and she says the procedure to fix the problem can be more complex when the child is older.