

When almost 2-year-old Savannah Elston was born, she had problems latching to nurse. For her mom Jenelle Elston, the lack of a good latch meant excruciating pain every time she fed her baby.

Little Savannah wasn't gaining weight as quickly as her doctors were hoping, and Elston was dreading feeding time.

After picturing breast feeding as a serene bonding time with her new baby girl, Elston says the reality was anything but.

"It hurt so bad I would cringe, I would just clench my teeth, that's how bad it hurt. But I just knew I wanted to keep pushing through and breastfeeding her, because that's what's best," she said.

Weeks after she was born, it was discovered Savannah was tongue-tied. A tongue-tie, or ankyloglossia, is a condition where a baby has an abnormal remnant of tissue called a frenulum that attaches to the tongue or lip.

"When it's off-kilter, and when they know that this is the best thing that I can do for my baby and I'm struggling, it's not going well, it's an incredibly emotional experience, and it's something that we have to address," said Sarah Musselman, RN, a Lactation Consultant at OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center.

For Savannah, an office procedure called a frenectomy was the solution. During this procedure a dentist clips the frenulum with scissors or a laser to free the tongue or lip.

After the procedure, Savannah relearned how to latch, and feeding became pain-free.

Fast forward almost two years, and the Elstons welcomed a new bundle of joy at the Birthing Center at OSF St. Joseph Medical Center – a baby girl named Heidi. After some initial feeding struggles in the hospital, a nurse suggested Heidi might also be tongue tied.

However this time around, a fast solution was available, practically at the bedside.

OSF St. Joseph Medical Center now offers in-unit frenectomies in the Birthing Center. Pediatric dentist Dr. Gregory Dietz performs the procedures in the Birthing Center using a laser.

"It has so many impacts physically, but also emotionally," explained Musselman. "So we really recognize the sooner we can make an impact to make the situation better, it's going to be a win for everyone."

During the procedure the baby is swaddled in a bassinet, and everyone in the room is wearing goggles - including the baby.

"It takes about 60 seconds if they do the tongue and about 60 seconds if he does the lip. There is minimal bleeding, and as soon as the baby is done the baby is returned to their parent. They can go ahead and go to the breast, and it's done," said Musselman.

"They just whisked her away in her little bassinet, and less than 10 minutes. I mean, I would say maybe 5 minutes she was back and she was just like looking around, and she wasn't crying," recalled Elston.

She says she saw the in-unit frenectomy as a simple fix to what could otherwise become a big problem.

“To get it fixed right then and there it helps a lot of moms from being in pain for weeks and then wanting to give up,” said Elston. “And I’m just grateful this time around because it is how it’s supposed to be.”

The Birthing Center at OSF St. Joseph Medical Center has earned Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative accreditation, meaning Mission Partners are dedicated to giving all mothers the information, confidence and skills necessary to successfully initiate and continue breastfeeding their babies or feeding formula safely.

For more information or to schedule a tour, please click [here](#) or call (309) 665-4703.