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Babies with tongue-ties most likely don't require surgery

Newborn babies usually do not require surgery to help with breastfeeding problems, according to a US study.

Ankyloglossia, more commonly known as tongue-tie, is a condition where the skin connecting the tongue of an infant's mouth can restrict its movement and make it difficult for them to latch on in [breastfeeding](#).

It is estimated that between 4% and 11% of babies are born with it, sometimes leading them to have a frenectomy – a surgical procedure where the tongue-tie is cut under local anaesthetic.

Research from Harvard Medical School [found](#) that two thirds of babies born with tongue-tie did not require surgery and could successfully breastfeed through other measures of help.

NCT breastfeeding counsellor Jane Moffett told the BBC: "Many women experience challenges when feeding their babies during the first days and weeks. In some cases, this may be due to tongue-tie. There is limited evidence to indicate which babies need a tongue-tie division and which do not."

The experts examined 115 newborn infants referred to the clinic for tongue-tie surgery.

Each mother-newborn pair met with a paediatric speech-language pathologist who performed a comprehensive feeding evaluation. They then offered feedback and coping strategies to determine the root cause of their breastfeeding challenges. Following the evaluation, 62.6% of the newborns did not undergo surgery.

Study co-author Cheryl Hersh, a paediatric speech-language pathologist at Massachusetts General Hospital for Children, said: "This is still a work in progress, but we have learned a great deal about what we can do differently to help our patients and their families. In doing so, we have been able to identify many babies who are having breastfeeding problems that are not related to their lip or tongue anatomy."

According to NHS data, over 4,000 procedures were carried out in England in 2015-16. However, this figure may be an underestimate, since simple outpatient procedures are not always recorded.

The research was published in [JAMA Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery](#).

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