

# Children's Health

## Talking About Tongue-Tie

(NAPSA)—Many people think of “tongue-tie” as a situation they find themselves in when they are too excited to speak. But tongue-tie is also the nonmedical term for a relatively common physical condition that limits the use of the tongue: ankyloglossia.

Before birth, a strong cord of tissue that guides development of mouth structures is positioned in the center of the mouth. It is called a frenulum. After birth, the lingual frenulum continues to guide the position of incoming teeth. As people grow, it recedes and thins. In some children, the frenulum is especially tight or fails to recede and may cause tongue mobility problems.

Because the tongue is one of the most important muscles for speech and swallowing, having tongue-tie can lead to eating or speech problems.

### When Is Tongue-Tie A Problem That Needs Treatment?

• **Feeding In Infants**—A new baby with a too-tight frenulum can have trouble sucking and feeding and may have poor weight gain. Such feeding problems should be discussed with your child's pediatrician, who may refer you to an otolaryngologist (head and neck surgeon/ear, nose and throat specialist). Nursing mothers who experience significant pain while nursing or whose baby has trouble latching on may also want to have their child evaluated for tongue-tie.

• **Speaking In Toddlers and Older Children**—Tongue-tie may be an issue if, around the age of 3, speech problems—especially articulation of the sounds “l,” “r,” “t,” “d,” “n,” “th,” “sh” and “z”—are noticeable. Evaluation may be needed if more than half of a 3-



**“Tongue-Tie” is a fairly common and treatable condition.**

year-old's speech is not understood outside of the family circle.

### Signs Of Tongue-Tie

- V-shaped notch at the tip of the tongue
- Inability to stick out the tongue past the upper gums
- Inability to touch the roof of the mouth with the tongue
- Difficulty moving the tongue from side to side
- Older children may have persistent dental problems

As a tongue-tie test, caregivers or parents might ask themselves if the child can lick an ice cream cone or lollipop without much difficulty. If the answer is no, then it may be time to consult a physician.

### Tongue-Tie Treatments

If surgery is recommended for your child, an otolaryngologist can perform a surgical procedure called a frenulectomy. It's a relatively simple surgery that normally has few complications. For very young infants (less than six weeks old), it may be done in the office of the physician. General anesthesia is recommended when frenulectomy is performed on older children. In addition to fixing the physical problem of ankyloglossia, the surgery often helps restore ease of speech and self-esteem.