

Suck Training Exercises

Important: Suck training exercises are helpful for regaining proper tongue function. The exercises below are **NOT** intended to replace the in-person help of a lactation consultant or health care professional. Any delay in seeking expert help may put the breastfeeding relationship at further risk.

Use these exercises before feeding or as a playtime activity. Be sure to stop any exercise that your baby dislikes. It is not necessary to do every exercise; only use those that are helpful for your baby. Before beginning, wash your hands and be sure your nails are short and smooth. It is best to work directly with a lactation consultant to determine which exercises are best for you and your baby.



Exercise 1: Finger Sucking

Use a finger (with a trimmed and filed nail) that closely matches the size of your nipple. Place the backside of this finger against the baby's chin with the tip of your finger touching the underside of the nose. This should stimulate the baby to gape widely. Allow the baby to draw in finger, pad side up, and suck. The *tongue should cover the lower gums* and your finger should be drawn into the juncture of the hard and soft palate. If the tongue is not forward over the lower gums, or if the back of the tongue bunches up, gently press down on the tongue (saying "down") and use forward (towards the lips) traction.



Exercise 2: Down and Out Stroking

Begin as in exercise 1, but turn finger over and press down on the back of the tongue and draw slowly out using downward and forward (toward lips) pressure on the tongue. Repeat a few times.



Exercise 3: Lateralizing Side to Side

Gently stroke the baby's lips until the mouth opens, and then stroke the lower and upper gums side to side. The tongue should follow your finger.



Exercise 4: Circular Strokes

Touch the baby's chin, nose and upper lip. When the baby opens wide, gently massage the tip of the tongue in circular motions pressing down and out, encouraging the tongue to move over the lower gums. Massage can continue back further on the tongue with light pressure as the finger moves back on the tongue and firmer pressure when the finger moves forward. Avoid gagging baby.



Exercise 5: Desensitizing Gag Reflex

If a baby has a *high or narrow palate* and gags on the nipple or insists on a shallow latch, it may help to desensitize the palate. Begin by massaging the baby's palate near the gum-line. Progressively massage deeper, but avoid gagging the baby. Repeat exercise until the baby will allow a finger to touch his palate while sucking on a finger. It may take several days of short exercise sessions to be effective.

Tips for the TIGHT and TENSE baby:

If your baby does not open wide, a gentle massage may help relax the jaw and facial muscles. A skilled body-worker such as a chiropractor, osteopath or craniosacral therapist who specializes in infant care may also help your baby. Begin with a light fingertip circular massage under the baby's jaw from back to front on both sides. Using fingertips, massage the baby's cheeks from the center toward the temple on both sides. Massage in tiny circles around the mouth, near the lips, clockwise and counter clockwise. Massage around the baby's mouth, near the lips, from center outward, on both sides of the mouth, top and bottom. Gently tap a finger over the baby's lips. Massage the baby's chin.