



Tethered Oral Tissues Resource Guide

What are tethered oral tissues?

When someone says there might be a tie (tongue, lip, and/or cheek), what do they mean? We all have these tissues in our mouths. However, some are restrictive to movement. From a medical perspective, ties are known as “tethered oral tissues.” Tethered oral tissues are congenital formations that restrict range of motion, which contribute to *functional deficits*. There are a total of seven frenula in the mouth: one lingual frenulum (tongue), two labial (lip) frenula and four buccal (cheek) frenula.

When someone has a tie that is restricting movement and therefore contributing to functional deficits (e.g., not being able to move the tongue to the roof of the mouth or moving it side to side as two examples), that person might be diagnosed with ankyloglossia (a restriction of the tongue), ankylolabia (a restriction of the lip(s)) or buccal ties (a restriction of the cheek(s)).

Intervention is only needed if the tie significantly restricts function as diagnosed by a professional that is trained in understanding the impact of ties. This can include deficits in eating/chewing/swallowing, TMJ pain, speech issues, breastfeeding issues and/or sleep and airway issues among others.

How does a tethered oral tissue develop?

The oral cavity forms during 5-12 weeks of gestation. In the case of tongue tie, the frenulum either does not recede as it should, during programmed cell death called apoptosis, or it forms with an abnormal dispersement of type I collagen fibers (the same type of fibers that make up scar tissue), that are inelastic. Research cites 4- 11% of the general population has a tongue tie.

New research is emerging regarding a certain gene mutation (MTHFR) and midline defects including tongue tie. Research also reveals autosomal dominant and X-linked inheritance patterns. What this means is that males are more likely to have a tongue tie and individuals with a tongue tie may have a family member with tongue tie.

What are signs and symptoms of tethered oral tissues?

Shallow or weak latch during breastfeeding or bottle feeding	Choking	TMJ pain/dysfunction
Maternal pain during breastfeeding	Constipation	Headaches & Migraines
GER	Excessive drooling	Neck tension
Noisy or clicking during breast and bottle feeding	Picky eating	Difficulty chewing & swallowing
Lip blisters either breast or bottle feeding	Poor speech intelligibility	Orthodontic replacement
	Sleep quality issues such as snoring, mouth breathing, restless sleeping, bedwetting & teeth grinding	

What to do about a potential tie?

If tethered oral tissues are suspected to be reducing the quality of life in one or more of the areas mentioned above, then a functional assessment by a professional trained in ties is recommended to determine if there is an impact on oral function. If a functional impact is identified, therapy will be initiated and a referral to consult with a release provider will be made once therapeutic readiness has been achieved for optimal results. Referrals to other providers such as orthodontists, body workers or ENT will be made as necessary for optimal oral facial development and growth.

To see a list of professionals who are trained in performing a functional assessment in ties in your area, please visit <http://www.chrysalisorofacial.com/directory>. If you are in or near Greenville, South Carolina, all of the therapists at Chrysalis Orofacial are trained and can perform a functional assessment. Please give us a call at 864-383-8634 to see if an evaluation is right for you or your loved one.

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