Could It Be a Tie?
Super Sleuthing for Tongue/Lip Tie

1. lip blister/crease
2. lip accordion
3. lip tuck
4. lip tether
5. two-tone tongue
6. high palate
7. tongue dents
8. tongue curl/cup
9. frenulum pop

Not meant as a diagnostic tool
Diagnosis is something only done by licensed medical providers. Searching the internet cannot replace a real-life evaluation and assessment by a knowledgeable IBCLC, and a diagnosis by a medical provider. This is not meant as a diagnostic tool; a tie is properly evaluated by function (how it works) and form (how it looks). A baby can have one or more of these traits and still not have a tie.

**Image 1:** Lip blisters are often thought to be a normal part of nursing, but these can actually be a sign of something more. That cute little callus under your baby’s philtrum could show he has to compensate with extra lip-grip versus being able to stay latched to the breast via a well-moving tongue and lip combo.

An upper lip that doesn’t easily fan over the breast often folds (image 2) or tucks (image 3) during nursing. If baby has what I term “smeared lipstick mouth” after nursing, this shows the lip didn’t flange as it should. Of course this can be positional, as well; if this frequently occurs, even with increased attempts to improve baby’s latch, it can be something to super sleuth.

**Image 2:** Accordion fan of a tight lip – see that horizontal line under the nose? Instead of opening to the breast, the upper lip folds. The crease will show as a red line once baby unlatches, as in image 1.

**Image 3:** Another compensation for a tight upper lip is that it may tuck inward. Some moms can manually turn out the lip by sweeping with a finger; other moms report the lip seems to turn into a tight band of tissue that is difficult to manipulate – it depends on the flexibility of each baby’s frenulum and lip.

**Image 4:** An easy way to get a hint if there may be a tongue tie is to flip the upper lip and view how the frenulum attaches to the gums. This is less invasive than checking under your baby’s tongue with your fingers. Many professionals agree, 90-99% of the time there is an upper lip tie present, there is likely a posterior tongue tie.

**Figure 5:** “Two-tone tongue” is a phrase Cathy Watson Genna shared with me. It is often mistaken for thrush, but many times there is a line across the tongue which shows where the tongue's movement becomes restricted, unlike thrush which can come in patches and doesn’t seem picky about where it develops. If the tongue isn't working optimally, the normal shedding of cells that occurs when the tongue moves against the palate (think of a tongue scraper), may not occur, and the white color reflects that. This can be *filiform papillae* overgrowth, sometimes called *hairy tongue*.

**Figure 6:** Another piece of low-hanging fruit is a baby's palate. When a baby cries, yawns, or is just hanging around, you can often take a peek to see his palate. Ideally, the palate is a horseshoe-shaped, wide surface, gently sloping from front to back. A tongue with optimal range of motion shapes and smooths the palate before birth through the act of swallowing. Babies with restrictions often have vaulted palates – arch, bubble, channel, V, or otherwise – due to the inability of the tongue to reach and mold the palate effectively.

**Figure 7:** I don’t know if there is a technical term for this, but many moms report their babies have “tongue dents,” or divots. These dents can occur as the tongue is being pulled by the underlying restrictions.

**Figure 8:** When crying, a baby’s tongue may curl or cup up. Again the force of the restriction is controlling the range of the tongue’s motion.

**Figure 9:** You can feel for the frenulum yourself. Your baby may be upset by this, but as his parent, your fingers will be the most comforting to him – so if you are wondering what’s going on, try for yourself. Place baby in your lap with his feet at your knees and come in from above his face. Gently use your index fingers to try and lift his tongue…and better if you have a partner ready to snap some pictures.

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