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## **ATP Lip-tie and Buccal-tie POSITION STATEMENT (2026)**

Currently, there is no published evidence supporting a link between breastfeeding and bottle-feeding issues with a lip-tie or buccal tie, despite claims on social media and other online sources.

The upper lip should not flange during breast and bottle feeding but should sit in a neutral or slightly everted position. This has been confirmed by real time MRI studies carried out by Mills et al, (2020).

Two systematic reviews of the literature have looked at lip tie in infancy.

Nakhash et al, (2019) concluded:

*‘No RCT were found, and the evidence for routine ULT release in infants with breastfeeding difficulties is the classification system proposed by Kotlow has not been found reliable both in terms of inter and intra-observer agreement and in terms of predicting the severity of the breastfeeding difficulties.’*

Weissman et al (2021) noted these key messages:

- 1. Many infants with upper lip tie undergo surgical procedures to release the maxillary frenulum to improve breastfeeding. However, it is not clear if this intervention is necessary or even useful.*
- 2. Limited data exist that correlate breastfeeding and the maxillary frenulum/ULT. None are from randomized trials and each of the studies have significant limitations.*
- 3. This critical review of the literature shows that there is currently no clear or strong evidence justifying maxillary frenulum release as a therapeutic procedure.*

In relation to buccal ties (cheek ties); The American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery Clinical Consensus Statement: Ankyloglossia in Children (Messner et al, 2020) notes:



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*The term “buccal tie” has been used to describe a perceived tightness in the maxillary and/or mandibular buccal frenula. The buccal frena are small connective tissue folds between the buccal mucosa and the maxillary or mandibular gingiva typically located between the canines and premolars. They correspond to the lateral border of the lower portion of the incisivus labii superioris fibers of the orbicularis oris muscle or the anterior border of the buccinator muscle. As such, the buccal frenulum augments the role of the buccinator in keeping the bolus between the teeth and in a medial position during the oral preparatory phase of swallowing. The importance of this function is underscored by evidence that manual cheek support enhances suction during breastfeeding.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is illogical that division or resection of the buccal frenulum would be useful in facilitating breastfeeding in infants. Furthermore, there are no existing criteria used to determine whether the buccal frenulum is restrictive. The panel reached a consensus recommendation against release of buccal frenula.*

Here in the UK, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) have not issued any guidance on the issue of lip and buccal ties and therefore training is not available in the UK for lip-tie or buccal tie division for practitioners working with infants.

This situation may change in the future if new research and evidence influence best practice guidelines. Currently nurse/midwife tongue-tie practitioners working in the UK cannot offer lip-tie or buccal tie division as the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s Code of Conduct states that nurses, midwives and health visitors must ‘deliver care based on the best available evidence or best practice’ and ensure any advice given is evidence based if suggesting healthcare products or services.

The Code also requires that nurses and midwives recognise and work within the limits of their competence. On the rare occasions that lip-ties are divided by surgeons in the NHS it is usually done in relation to concerns about dental issues, not breastfeeding. If you have concerns about lip-ties we suggest you discuss this with your dentist.

This article [“Lip Tie – What’s it all about?”](#) was written by our past Chair, Sarah Oakley, for the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers.



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References:

Messner et al (2020) [Clinical Consensus Statement: Ankyloglossia in Children - Messner - 2020 - Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery - Wiley Online Library](#)

Mills et al (2020) [Imaging the breastfeeding swallow: Pilot study utilizing real-time MRI - Mills - 2020 - Laryngoscope Investigative Otolaryngology - Wiley Online Library](#)

Nakhash et al (2019) [Upper Lip Tie and Breastfeeding: A Systematic Review - Rizeq Nakhash, Natanel Wasserteil, Francis B. Mimouni, Yair M. Kasirer, Cathy Hammerman, Alona Bin-Nun, 2019](#)

Weismann et al (2021) [Implications of the Maxillary Frenulum on Breastfeeding: A Critical Review](#)