

One of the Most Common Signs of Tongue Tie

by Dr Bobby Ghaheri MD. Written on 26 October 2017.

[This is a video demonstrating “clicking”](#) - a perfect example of a click. What you hear is a repeated break of the seal. Why does this happen?

1) The tongue is supposed to go up during breastfeeding. The normal motion is that the middle of the tongue pushes the breast/nipple up to form a seal and then the tongue drops down to form a vacuum in the baby’s mouth. Milk flows towards the vacuum and baby gets milk.

2) A very common cause of clicking is tongue tie. This can happen with both anterior tongue tie and posterior tongue tie (anterior tongue tie always has a posterior TT right behind it). For a baby to click, the tongue has to first create a seal. Then during the attempted motion of trying to push the tongue up, the tongue tie “pulls” the tongue back off the breast (or bottle) and breaks the seal, which creates the clicking noise. That’s what you’re hearing in this video. To me, every click is an opportunity for air ingestion (aerophagia) which is a primary driver of reflux and colic.

3) Other things can cause the sound so an evaluation by an IBCLC *before* any intervention is offered. This is done to avoid unnecessary procedures.

4) Clicking can be absent when sucking on a finger or narrow neck bottle but present when breastfeeding. Why? If the mouth is more closed, then the tongue has less distance to cover during elevation to form a seal (like with the mouth closed around the finger or bottle). If the mouth has to open more to get on the breast, that added distance may be enough to provoke the tie to pull the tongue back down, creating the clicking noise.

A few points of clarification regarding clicking:

A) following a TT release, clicking often disappears for a few feeds and then comes back. Sometimes, the clicking doesn’t ever disappear. Why? Well, a proper tongue tie release gives the baby mobility. It does not give the baby lingual strength. Even if the tongue can go up to make the initial seal, if there’s no stamina, then the tongue will fall back off and the click will occur. It can take weeks for the clicking to disappear.

B) Some babies start out not clicking and then following a proper TT release, the clicking begins. This happens in babies whose ties are so severe that the tongue never even makes the initial seal. Without a seal, there can be no break of the seal, so no clicking noise. Post-procedure, the tongue can move up better but the strength still isn’t there so the clicking happens.

C) I interpret clicking as part of a spectrum of symptoms that contribute to infant reflux. Others include milk leaking out of the sides of the mouth, audible gulping of air, hiccups, sneezing in clusters (reflux into the back of the nose), back arching (from

discomfort from the reflux) and nasal congestion (from chronic refluxate into the nose).

IBCLCs should be listening for clicking and should be asking for it. Sometimes, clicking isn't as obvious early in the day when baby has some stamina but may show up for evening feeds. Many moms will misinterpret the sound for a normal swallow sound, so having examples to demonstrate the pathology can be helpful.

For the parents out there - if the sound is present and doesn't go away with IBCLC support of latch/positioning techniques, inquire about tongue tie. You may very well know more about it than your doctor and IBCLC.

[Watch the video here.](#)