



Beyond Birth ABQ

Infant Exercises Before and After Release

Do these exercises 2-4x/day when your baby is alert and ready to play. Some exercises can be done while they are relaxed and almost asleep too. These exercises can help reduce body tension and improve oral function.

Open Mouth, Low Resting Tongue

Alternate nasal breathing:

Use the soft pad of your finger to block the left nostril. Hold 3-5 seconds while baby breaths comfortably through other nostril. Switch to right nostril, and repeat. It's easiest to do this while baby is sleepy or nursing to ensure nasal breathing.

Brain Mapping:

Using various tools, touch the baby's tongue, then palate to encourage the brain to map the tongue to palate (The Spot). Next touch the tongue, then chin, encouraging tongue extension. Use long cotton swabs, coffee stirrers, soft plastic forks, chop sticks, etc. Can dip tools in breastmilk too. When lips are open, press them together like duck lips.

Sleeping Tongue Posture Hold:

When baby is sleeping, lower the bottom lip and jaw slightly to see where the tongue is resting. If it is resting low, then press up gently on the soft part under the chin to lift the tongue to the Spot on the palate. Then press down on the chin again until the tongue releases from the palate. Repeat 3 times. See website for video.

Lip Tension

Lip Massage:

Use a finger to massage in small circles around the lips. Start at the top and work in a clockwise direction. Then use finger to brush the lips on the outside (like you were brushing the teeth). Go around the lips 2-3 times with each motion.

Lip Stretch:

Take the center of the upper lip between the index finger and thumb. Then sweep in a "C" direction around the lip, following the curve of the cheek to the center of the bottom lip. Stretch 3 times on each side. Next, squeeze center of the upper lip (philtrum) and pull gently outward and away from the gum, then downward. Return to neutral. Finish by sliding your fingers to smoothing out the upper lip towards corners of the mouth (as if smoothing out a "mustache").

Cheek Tension

Granny Cheeks:

Using thumb and forefinger, place one on either side of baby's face. Gently squeeze the cheeks while pulling the tissue forward like a "fishy face". Repeat 3-5 times. Babies love this, make funny noises or sing, move your tongue too.

Cheek Pull:

Using your thumb outside and index finger inside the mouth, massage the cheek between your fingers. Pull the cheek out to stretch, then sweep your fingers out along the cheek.

Jaw Tension

TMJ Massage:

On both sides of the face, place fingertips on the temples and massage in a gentle but firm, circular motion. Work downward along jawline, making small circles, until you reach the chin.

Walk the Chin:

Begin just below base of the jaw near the ear, apply some gentle forward pressure to the jaw and hold for a few seconds. Then slowly walk the fingertips forward to tip of chin. Do several times, moving towards the center each time.

Tongue Exercises**Beep-Bop-Boop:**

With baby facing you, use a fingertip to touch tip of nose, then philtrum (area between nose and lip), then chin. Apply gentle downward pressure to the chin to encourage wide gape (open mouth) and tongue extension (sticking it out). Make small circles on the tip of the tongue to encourage it to stick out.

Follow the Finger:

Trace baby's lower & upper gums with your finger slowly from left to right, allowing baby to track your finger with their tongue. If the tongue does not follow well, press on the side of the tongue or brush the gums like brushing teeth. Pause on the molar areas to encourage your baby to chew on your finger. This helps the side-to-side movements of the tongue.

Palate Zig Zags:

Beginning with your finger pad up just behind the gums, sweep your finger from the center to the side, applying gentle pressure against the gum to help widen the palate. Then move the finger to the middle for a brief "hold" as you move to the other side and apply pressure on the gum. Continue in a zig-zag pattern towards the posterior palate and pause just at the edge of the gag reflex. This helps shift the gag reflex farther back so they don't gag on the breast or bottle.

Tongue Walk & Push-ups:

Encourage baby to suck on finger, pad side up, then flip finger over and press down, drawing finger along central groove of tongue towards tip, like petting a cat. Then press down on the center of the tongue in 3 spots (like a frog jump as you draw finger outward). Touch back, middle, then tongue tip to encourage the tongue to move against your finger.

Tug-O-War:

Encourage the baby to suck your finger (pad side up). Sometimes it helps to press gently with your thumb on the upper lip. As baby sucks, press down gently on the tongue to encourage it to "cup" the finger first. Then resist them by gently pulling your finger out, allowing them to pull back in. You can do this game with your finger, the bottle or a pacifier.

Tongue Huggies:

Create a "V" with the first and middle finger and slide into the back of the mouth along the lower gumline. Using a scissor motion, gently squeeze and pull outward along the side of tongue. Next place the "V" under the back of tongue touching the floor of the mouth, to help lift, cup and extend the tongue.

Latch Challenge:

While the baby is sucking on your finger (pad side up) or on a bottle, push the chin down slowly until the latch releases. Repeat several times. This strengthens the cupping suction of the tongue to the nipple.

Head Extension:**Therapeutic Intentional Tummy Time & Rhythmic Movement:**

Total goal of 30 minutes/day by 1 month and 60 minutes by 2 months. Can be done in short bursts on a mat, parent's chest and over a boppy or exercise ball. Tickle the back of neck down between shoulder blades to get head to lift and neck to extend instead of lifting the body with back muscles. See website for videos on tummy time, rhythmic movement.

Head Hangs & Guppy:

Try when baby is calm or even asleep. Lay baby across the lap (face up) with head extending over your thigh. Allow baby to arch head backwards and encourage baby to turn head left and right. Place a hand on the chest for security. Try wearing babies or just support the baby in your hands with head extended. See website for videos on guppy position.