



## FRENULOTOMY AND FRENULECTOMY FOR ANKYLOGLOSSIA (TONGUE TIE) Ndivhuwo Diale, Shazia Peer, Jessica McGuire

Frenulotomy (also referred to as frenotomy) and frenulectomy (frenectomy) are surgical procedures used to correct ankyloglossia, a congenital condition in which the lingual frenulum is too short, causing restricted tongue movement. It is commonly called a tongue tie and it affects 4-11% of neonates<sup>1</sup>.

Frenulotomy refers to an incision in the frenulum that frees the tongue from the floor of the mouth. Frenulectomy refers to complete excision of the frenulum. It is more invasive and may be difficult to perform on small children; however, the results are more predictable, and the recurrence rate is lower.

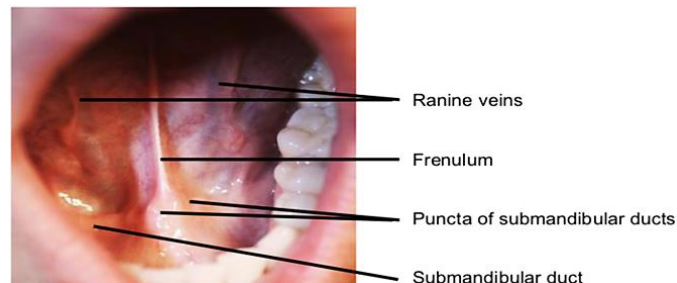
### Anatomy

The tongue is attached to the floor of the mouth by the lingual frenulum. The frenulum's appearance varies considerably between individuals. Microdissection of cadavers shows that it is a dynamic, layered structure formed by oral mucosa and the underlying floor of mouth fascia, which is mobilised into a midline fold with tongue elevation and/or retraction<sup>2</sup>.

The base of the frenulum contains a "V" shaped hump of tissue in the floor of the mouth which houses the two Wharton's ducts on either side. The sublingual salivary glands empty through tiny ducts on either side of Wharton's ducts. Superficial veins running through the base of the frenulum are known as ranine veins (*Figure 1*).

### Classification of ankyloglossia (*Table 1*)

Currently, there are no established criteria or grading systems to classify ankyloglossia.



*Figure 1: Floor of the mouth and ventral surface of the tongue*

Several studies have suggested various guidelines based on the following criteria:

- Length of the frenulum<sup>3,4</sup>
- Upward tongue mobility (difficulty lifting the tongue to the upper dental alveolus)<sup>5,6</sup>
- Limited tongue protrusion  $\leq 1-2$  mm past the lower central incisors<sup>7</sup>
- Impaired lateral mobility of the tongue, 'heart-shaped-tongue-appearance' and thick fibrous cord palpated on physical examination<sup>8</sup>

The classification by *Coryllos* permits identification of type III and IV frenula, which can go unnoticed with macroscopic examination, by means of palpation (*Table 1*). For a diagnosis of ankyloglossia in neonates it is necessary to combine both functional and anatomical criteria.

### Indications for surgery

There has been a surge in frenulotomies performed on neonates in recent years in an attempt to improve breastfeeding. A Cochrane review found that frenulotomy reduced mothers' nipple pain and had for the most part, positive short-term effects on breastfeeding<sup>1</sup>.

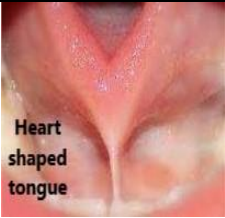



Type 1	Most extreme form, 100% of the tongue is attached to the lingual frenulum and is tethered to the floor of the mouth anteriorly	 Heart shaped tongue
Type 2	75% of the tongue is tethered with restricted elevation and extension of the tongue	
Type 3	50% of the tongue is tethered. Tongue appears normal, but mobility is limited.	
Type 4	Limited tongue mobility due to a posterior, fibrous limitation of the most distal portion of the lingual frenulum	

Table 1: Modified grading system developed by Coryllos et al <sup>9</sup>. Type 2-4 images obtained from Yoon et al <sup>10</sup>

### Indications

- Difficulty feeding, poor latch in breast-feeding babies and poor weight gain
- Difficulty swallowing
- Decreased mobility of tongue
- Speech difficulties
- Significant dental problems

A frenulotomy is appropriate in patients with symptomatic type 2-4 ankyloglossia, provided that the frenulum is not fibrotic. Type 1 ankyloglossia, fibrotic frenula and revision cases would benefit from a frenulectomy.

In neonates and infants, it may be performed under local anaesthesia in an outpatient setting. The author has performed this procedure in a 16-week infant. The op-

timum age to perform a frenulotomy in infants is unclear <sup>1</sup> and the age limit to performing the procedure under local anaesthesia is equally unclear. Consider a general anaesthesia in babies much older than 16 weeks.

### Frenulotomy

Surgical consent is obtained.

#### a. Outpatient Awake Procedure

##### Positioning

- The child is swaddled and restrained by an assistant
- The child is then placed flat with head in neutral position and mouth open

##### Local anaesthesia

- Lignocaine HCl 1% m/v local anaesthetic with adrenaline 1:160000 is injected on either side of the frenulum
- The dose limit is 7mg/kg and each 1ml contains 10mg of lignocaine
- This is important to bear in mind for small infants

##### Procedure

- A grooved retractor is used to retract the tongue (*Figures 3,4,5*)
- A straight Crile haemostat is used to crimp the frenulum prior to release
- Sterile curved scissors are then used to release the lingual frenulum at its attachment
- The incision should be close to the ventral surface of the tongue to avoid injury to the ductal orifices
- To ensure adequate release of the frenulum, using your finger, gently massage the tongue at the deep end of the cut frenulum.

- The floor of mouth is compressed with gauze to provide haemostasis, if necessary

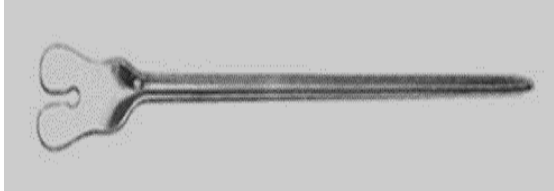


Figure 3: Example of a grooved retractor



Figure 4: Grooved retractor manufactured from a teaspoon



Figure 5: Grooved retractor tenting the frenulum

In the awake child, sucking and oral 50% dextrose syrup may also be used to soothe the infant

## b. General Anaesthesia

### Intubation

- Intermittent mask ventilation or nasal intubation is preferable for adequate access
- Oral intubation may also be performed

### Positioning

- Place the child in a supine position with head extended
- Open the mouth and use the grooved retractor to retract the tongue

### Surgical steps

- Inject or apply topical pledgets soaked with 1:80000 lignocaine with adrenaline to either side of frenulum
- Use the grooved retractor to retract the ventral tongue to fully expose the lingual frenulum (Figure 5)
- Clamp a straight Crile haemostat onto frenulum parallel to the tongue at its ventral surface (Figure 6)
- Wait a few seconds, and then release the haemostat



Figure 6: Haemostat clamped parallel to tongue

- Use sterile iris scissors to release the lingual frenulum at its attachment (Figures 6-8)
- Make the incision close to the ventral surface of the tongue to avoid the submandibular and sublingual salivary gland ducts which open onto the floor of the mouth
- To break down deeper fibrous bands, gentle finger / peanut dissection is recommended (encountered more often in thicker frenula and revision cases)



*Figure 7: Middle finger retracting lower lip to avoid injuring it while lingual frenulum is released*



*Figure 8: Diamond-shaped wound following frenulotomy*

- The genioglossus muscle is the posterior limit of the frenulum incision
- Compress the floor of mouth with gauze to provide haemostasis
- In revision cases, or with older children, interrupted absorbable sutures can be placed to prevent the release from adhering back down onto the floor of mouth. Take care near the papilla of the submandibular ducts (*Figure 9*)



*Figure 9: In revision cases, or older children, interrupted absorbable sutures can be placed to prevent the release from adhering back down onto the floor of mouth*

#### **Complications of surgery (rare)**

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Swelling
- Discomfort
- Injury to Wharton's duct
- Scarring requiring revision

#### **Z-Frenuloplasty**

This is recommended in older children and revision cases to improve speech.

#### **Surgical Steps**

- Place a silk stitch through the tongue tip to retract the tongue and hold it in place (*Figure 10*)
- Apply lignocaine with adrenaline injection of 1:80 000 or topical pledgets to either side of frenulum
- Make a vertical/longitudinal incision along the length of the frenulum (*Figure 10*)

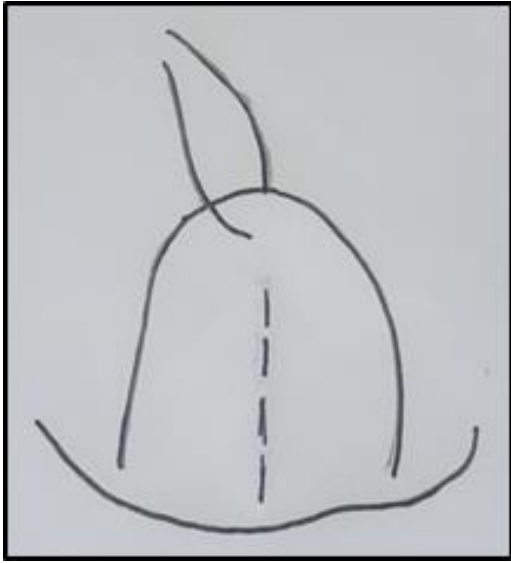


Figure 10: Vertical incision along length of the frenulum

- This is followed with 2 incisions made at 90° to the first vertical one (Figure 11)

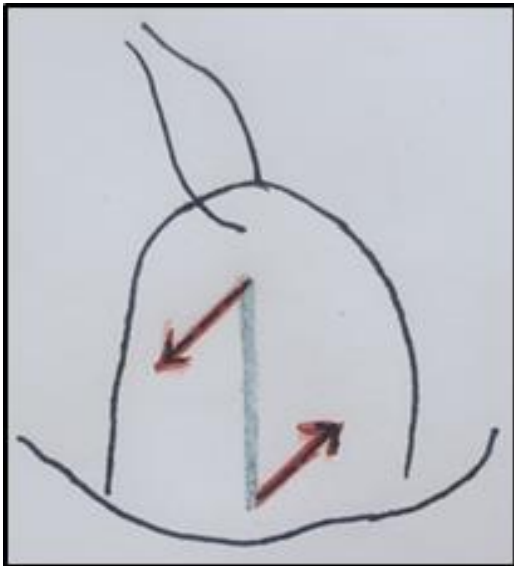


Figure 11: Two incisions at 90° to vertical incision

- Two rectangular flaps are now created and will be elevated (Figure 12)

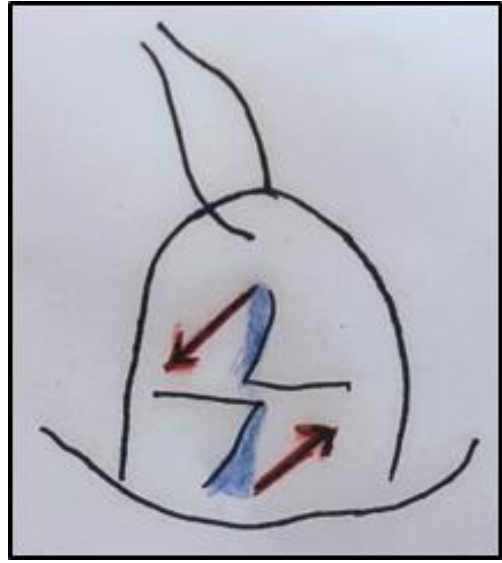


Figure 12: Two flaps are created and will be elevated

- Transpose the 2 flaps adjacent to each other to close in the form of a Z-plasty (Figure 13)



Figure 13: Transpose the 2 flaps adjacent to each other to close in the form of a Z-plasty

- Suture with interrupted 5.0 vicryl (Figure 14)

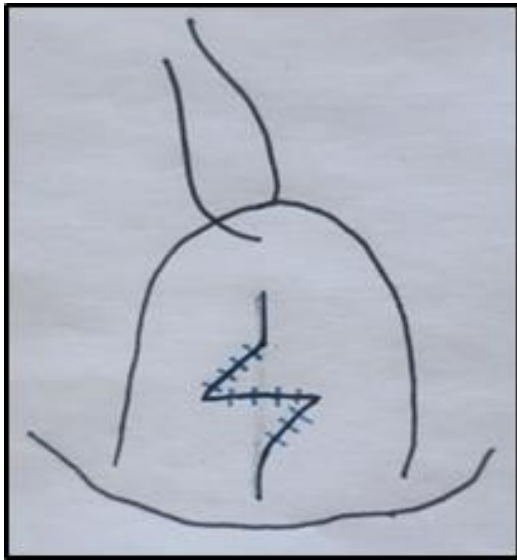


Figure 14: Sutures in place to complete the Z-plasty

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## Authors

Ndivhuwo Diale MBChB, MMed, FCORL  
Otolaryngologist  
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences  
University, Gauteng Province,  
South Africa  
[ndivhuwobele@yahoo.com](mailto:ndivhuwobele@yahoo.com)

Shazia Peer MBChB, MMed, FCORL  
Paediatric Otolaryngologist  
Red Cross War Memorial Children's  
Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa  
[shazia.peer@uct.ac.za](mailto:shazia.peer@uct.ac.za)

Jessica McGuire MBChB, MMed, FCORL  
Paediatric Otolaryngology  
Red Cross War Memorial Children's  
Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa  
[jkmcguire2@gmail.com](mailto:jkmcguire2@gmail.com)

## Paediatric Section Editor

Nico Jonas MBChB, FCORL, MMed  
Paediatric Otolaryngologist  
Addenbrooke's Hospital

Cambridge, United Kingdom  
[nicojonas@gmail.com](mailto:nicojonas@gmail.com)

### Author and Editor

Johan Fagan MBChB, FCS(ORL), MMed  
Professor and Chairman  
Division of Otolaryngology  
University of Cape Town  
Cape Town, South Africa  
[johannes.fagan@uct.ac.za](mailto:johannes.fagan@uct.ac.za)

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