

# Sucking Exercises

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The purpose of these exercises is to help improve the tongue functions needed for proper infant feeding from the breast. Practice these exercises with your baby 3–5 times per day, ideally before feedings. Always wash your hands before and be sure you have trimmed fingernails.

## Extension

The goal of this exercise is to encourage baby to stick their tongue out over her bottom gum (and even lower lip).

1. Using the pad of your index finger, gently tap, stroke, or roll your baby's bottom lip down toward the chin. Your baby should try to "chase" your finger toward the chin with their tongue.
2. If your baby is hesitant to extend, try tapping their forehead, then upper lip, then lower lip/chin area.
3. If your baby seems to be struggling with this function, see the last step of the Sucking Tug-of-War exercise.

## Sucking Tug-of-War

The goal of this exercise is to strengthen your baby's suck. Your baby should hold your finger securely in their mouth with their tongue (not using gums or jaws).

1. Tap your index finger around your baby's mouth and wait for them to root and accept your finger into their mouth, pad side up.
2. Gently massage your baby's palate by moving your finger side-to-side in a windshield wiper motion.
3. Then, advance your finger toward your baby's soft palate. If your baby gags, remove your finger and try again.
4. Then, let your baby suck on your finger. Resist this suck by gently pulling your finger out, allowing your baby to use their tongue to pull it back in.
5. If your baby was not extending well with the extension exercises, flip your finger over so the pad side is down on the tongue. Gently press down on the rear of the tongue and pull forward while your baby sucks to encourage extension.

## Lateralization

The goal of this exercises is to improve the side-to-side movement of your baby's tongue.

1. Place your index finger or pinky pad side down on your baby's bottom gum where their two bottom front teeth with come in.
2. Then, gently trace along the gumline to the back of their mouth where the molars will come in. Try to swipe along the side of the tongue while you trace.
3. Look for your baby to follow your finger with the tip of their tongue without twisting their tongue. Repeat 3 times on each side of the mouth.