

encourage the baby to use his tongue correctly, suggest the mother try helping him learn more effective tongue movements on her finger before putting him to the breast.

Before putting baby to the breast, help baby learn more effective sucking patterns, suggest the mother put gentle pressure on the middle third of his tongue, inserting her clean finger (with trimmed fingernail) pad side down, so that baby's tongue cups her finger. While the baby is sucking on her finger, suggest the mother use her other hand to put gentle pressure under the bony point of the baby's jaw with her index finger to stabilize the baby's tongue. Do this for less than a minute before putting baby to breast.

If this doesn't result in better sucking at the breast, suggest the mother try the above while dripping some milk into the baby's mouth to encourage him to bring the tongue down and forward while sucking and swallowing.

Other exercises that have helped some babies include:

Walking Back on the Tongue

- Touch the baby's cheek with a finger, moving toward his lips. Then brush his lips a few times with a clean index finger (the fingernail should be trimmed) to encourage him to open his mouth.
- Massage the outside of the baby's gums with the index finger, beginning each stroke at the middle of the baby's upper or lower gum and moving toward either side.
- When the baby opens his mouth, use the tip of the index finger to press down firmly on the top of the tip of the baby's tongue and count slowly to three before releasing the pressure.
- Release the pressure, keeping the finger in the baby's mouth, and move back a little farther on his tongue, pressing again to a count of three.
- Move back on the tongue one or two more times.
- Try to avoid gagging the baby. If the baby gags, notice how far back in the baby's mouth the finger was and avoid putting it that far back the next time.
- Repeat the entire "tongue walk" three or four times before each nursing.

Pushing the Tongue Down and Out

- Put a clean upturned index finger (with a trimmed fingernail) into the baby's mouth with the fingernail side pressing gently on the baby's tongue.
- Leave the finger in that position for about thirty seconds while the baby sucks on it.
- Turn the finger over slowly so that the finger pad is on the baby's tongue and push down on his tongue while gradually pulling the finger out of his mouth.
- Repeat this exercise several times before latching the baby onto the breast.

If the baby becomes upset during these exercises, or if little improvement is seen after several days of trying them, suggest the mother contact a professional with expertise in sucking problems relating to breastfeeding. See the previous section, "Inconsistent Nurse," for specific professionals who may be able to help.

If the other strategies do not work, suggest the mother try nursing with a nipple shield, as the firmer silicone can push the breast past the tongue and help some tongue-thrusting babies latch on and suck effectively.

Babies who thrust their tongues often have difficulty drawing the breast back to the spot in their mouths that triggers effective sucking. If none of the previous suggestions work, suggest the mother try using a silicone nipple shield at the breast. The silicone, which is firmer than the soft breast tissue, may be able to push past the tongue so that the baby feels the right stimulation and starts sucking more effectively. See the earlier section, "Weak Suck," for information on how to choose, fit, apply, use, and wean from a nipple shield.