

Face and mouth exercises for Newborn Babies

Some babies have problems with the muscles that control and co-ordinate sucking and swallowing.

This may be because they were born premature or have been unwell and frail.

Some babies may have a smaller lower jaw that makes lip closure harder.

Some babies have respiratory problems that make coordinating breathing and feeding difficult.

The following brochure includes some practical hints they can help parents and carers who have a baby who is slow to establish breast or bottle feeds due to a weak sucking action or poor oral control. Babies mainly breathe through their nose for the first six months of life.

Each baby needs individual assessment to ensure that the appropriate exercises and advice is gained. This information is meant as a guide only. Should your baby still have difficulty feeding, then reassessment is vital. Contact your physiotherapist, speech pathologist, lactation consultant or midwife/ community nurse.



STIMULATION FOR THE MOUTH AND FACE OF BABIES

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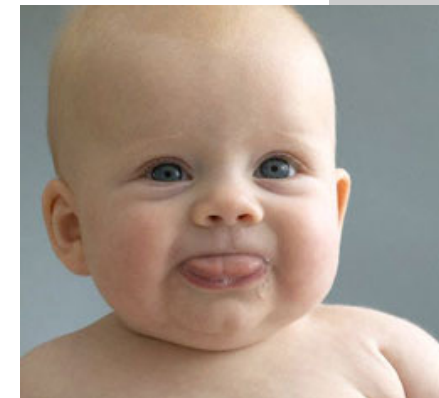
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Mouth and facial stimulation

Make sure your baby is in a well supported propped position:

Their head should be in the middle and their chin can be slightly tucked to their chest. They should not have their neck extended.

A good position to carry out the following exercises in, is lying your baby lengthwise along a pillow.

Lying your baby on your lap between your knees and facing you is another good position.

Exercises should be done for only one minute, just before breast, bottle or naso-gastric feeds.

Don't overstimulate your baby by doing too many exercises:

- 1. Using your index finger, gently circle your baby's lips in either direction .**
- 2. Gently stroke from the corner of the mouth up to the cheekbone each side.**
- 3. Insert your index finger into your baby's mouth between the gum and cheek, gently stretch the cheek out with your finger for 3-5 seconds.**

4. Gently brush the centre of your baby's lip from the gum to the bottom of the lip.

5. Stroke both sides of your baby's throat with your thumb and index finger from the chin down to the collar bone.



6. Using your little finger encourage baby to suck by gradually advancing your finger towards the middle of their tongue. Make sure that your baby's tongue is under your finger and not rolled up.

7. When a baby is being naso-gastrically fed, offer a dummy or your little finger. This improves your baby's awareness that sucking is linked with a full tummy. It also improves absorption of milk from the gut and matures the sucking reflex.

Being still:

A stable 'still' body allows for increased control around the mouth. When your baby has a stable posture and is well supported, their jaw and neck muscles can best work for feeding.

If a baby is unsupported/ unstable it finds it hard to use its jaw, cheek and mouth muscles to suck and swallow.

Activities to promote a stable posture and independent head and eye movements are important.

Tummy time: supervised time spent on their stomach when awake— whether on a mat or on your stomach facing you— encourages head clearance and prepares your baby for managing different textures and tastes.

Nappy change activities: Talk to your baby and establish eye contact.

With nappy off, bring arms together to cuddle themselves like a bear hug.

Allow baby to feel their own hands.

Encourage baby to take their hands to mouth.

Stroke across baby's tummy under their belly button with firm diagonal strokes.

When they start interacting replace these activities with tummy tickling, 'blowing raspberries' and feet play.

Curl their legs up with knees together and hold for lower body cuddle. Encourage knees together and rock them side to side to help body rotation.

Ensure your baby turns their head equally to both sides.