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Baby Mouth Massage & Exercises

Mouth massage exercises can promote jaw mobility, assist with strengthening oral musculature and bring awareness to oral structures. The massage routine serves as a “warm-up” for feedings so you can try them just before feeding or during a break from feeding towards the start of a meal:

- Massaging your baby’s mouth should be a pleasant and positive experience for your child. If he/she shows signs of irritability or seems uncomfortable with the massage, discontinue the exercise and either try a different one or try again another time.
- Talk to your baby and calm/soothe your baby during oral massage.
- These exercises can be done a few times daily and completed in just a few minutes (no more than 3 minutes each time).
- It is important for you to be aware of your baby’s communication signs as some babies are more sensitive in and around the mouth.
- Mouth massage may be used during the first 2 years of life and beyond!
- Always wear gloves while putting your fingers in your baby’s mouth.
- Use songs and music to calm and soothe your baby and add to the pleasant experience while doing exercises.
- Mouth exercises and massage are different from oral stretches following a tongue-tie procedure.

Outer Cheek & Lip Circles

1. Massage your baby’s face by making circles with your index and middle fingers. Press firmly but gently into your baby’s cheeks, making 3-5 circles while moving towards the lips.
2. Once near the lips, squeeze lips and “pucker” them with a slight tug and release.
3. Use index finger to make 3-5 smaller circles around the border of the lips while moving toward the center of the lips.

Inner Cheek Massage

If a baby is born without adequate sucking pads in the cheeks, this massage can help your baby develop awareness of their cheek muscles to help with keeping the cheeks close to the gums for better

intraoral pressure for swallowing. By 3-4 months, the sucking pads begin shrinking and by 6 months, the pads are gone.

1. Use small, firm but gentle strokes inside of your baby's cheeks. Extend high enough to feel the bottom of baby's cheekbones from the inside of his/her mouth.
2. Stroke inner cheeks from top to bottom in a circular pattern, ending with a slight pull or tug towards the lips.

Gum Massage/Traces

1. massage your baby's upper and lower gums by running your index finger along the gum line, beginning at the left backmost point of the arch and moving toward the right backmost Point.
2. You can move from the left gumline to right gumline (and back) across the tongue in a rainbow motion across the tongue. Try to avoid gagging the baby. If the baby gags, notice how far back your finger was in the baby's mouth. Avoid going that far back the next time.

Side Tongue Pushes

1. Following gum traces, keep your finger between the upper and lower gums and gently push into your baby's tongue 3 times. You want to feel your baby's tongue follow your finger and gently push into your finger.
2. Alternate the left and right sides 2 times each side, traveling to the other side with a gum trace. Stay connected to your baby's gumline the entire time.
3. If your baby gags with this movement, pull your finger away and switch to the other side but return to the side she/he gagged on and re-do the side pushes—Notice how far back you were on the sides of the tongue and avoid going that far back the next time.

Tongue "Walking"

You will massage your baby's tongue near the front if your baby is a newborn. By 6-9 months, your child's gag reflex should occur on the back 1/3 of the tongue so you can massage the front 2/3 of the tongue.

1. Use the tip of the index finger to press on the tip of the baby's tongue for a few seconds. Keeping the finger in the baby's mouth, move back a little farther on the tongue, pressing again for a few seconds.
2. Try to avoid gagging the baby. If the baby gags, notice how far back your finger was in the baby's mouth. Avoid going that far back the next time.

Tongue "Tug-of-War"

1. Gently stroke your baby's lower lip, then gently stroke the upper inner gum using your pinky finger turned up toward the ceiling and allow your baby to suck your index finger into his/her mouth. Swipe the roof of the mouth gently to stimulate your baby to suck if necessary, but be careful to NOT push the tip of your finger into the center of your baby's roof of the mouth (hard palate) —this area is very flexible at birth, like the soft spot on your baby's head.
2. Once suck is established, pull your finger slightly out of the mouth until just before baby loses suction. Allow him/her to suck it back in. (We want your baby's tongue to cup or groove around your finger.) Repeat a few times.

"Chomp Chomp"

If your baby has any jaw weakness, or underdeveloped sucking pads, he/she may try to stabilize the jaw by biting on the bottle/breast. This exercise encourages strengthening of the cheek muscles.

1. Place the side of your index finger pad between the back gum ridges (where the back molars will eventually be) and allow your baby to chew on the side of your finger.
2. Make sure your baby is chewing on the fleshy area to the side of your fingernail as the entire pad of the index finger may be too large for a small baby's mouth and may be uncomfortable.
3. By pressing firmly but gently on the back of the top molar area, you may counteract the tendency of your child's palate to become high and narrow.

The Importance of TUMMY TIME!

- Tummy Time should begin as soon as your baby comes home from the hospital.
- Tummy Time is essential for infants' core, motor, and sensory development and achievement of milestones.
- Helps improve neck and head control, and strengthens back, shoulder muscles, and core
- Prevents flat spots on baby's head
- Promotes motor and sensory development
- Helps alleviate the symptoms of Reflux over time by strengthening the musculature around the larynx
- You can do modifications of Tummy Time if your baby "hates" it at first by placing baby on your lap or on your chest.

SEE ATTACHED HANDOUT ON TUMMY TIME from Pathways.org—great resource!

You can search videos on YOUTUBE by Lisa Lahey for various examples of oral massage and exercises. She is an incredible resource for parents.

Always talk to your provider about which exercises to do with your baby.

References:

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