

## 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. These exercises can be done a few times daily and completed in just a few minutes. 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!

### 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. Make 3-5 smaller circles on the lips while moving toward the center of the lips.

### Tongue “Tug-of-War”

1. Gently stroke your baby’s lower lip and allow your baby to suck your index finger into his/her mouth. Swipe the roof of the mouth gently to stimulate baby to suck if necessary. Do NOT push the tip of your finger into the center of your baby’s hard palate (the roof of the mouth) – this area is very flexible at birth, like the soft spot on your baby’s head.
2. 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.

### 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.

### Cheek & Gum 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.

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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. Next, massage your baby's upper and lower jaws 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.

### **"Chomp Chomp"**

If your baby has mild 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.

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