

Bonded

When babies have difficulty nursing, **Dr. David Stall** offers a quick and effective solution to enable this precious bond between mother and child.

As the mother cradles her newborn, the moment of a lifetime has arrived. She gently strokes her baby's face and scalp, eliciting a loving look and sleepy-eyed coo. The heartwarming scene makes the mother feel blessed. The bond between them strengthens by the minute.

The new mother then does what new mothers typically do: She tries to breastfeed her child. To her disappointment, the baby doesn't take to the nursing—doesn't latch, doesn't feed. The mother's joy wanes. A lactation consultant is brought in to examine the child and assess the situation. The determination: The infant has a physical condition known as "TOT," or tethered oral tissues, also known as a tongue-tie or lip-tie. Each malady can restrict the movements needed to nurse.

That's the bad news. The good news is each condition can be corrected in as little as 30 seconds by David Stall, D.M.D., of David Stall Dental in West Chester.

Using a LightScalpel CO2 laser, Dr. Stall can quickly vaporize the frenum, the membrane between the underside of the tongue and the floor of the mouth or gums; in a lip-tie, the same instrument can do away with the membrane connecting the underside of the top lip to the gums.

"When I started doing this procedure about three and a half years ago, a friend who knew I used lasers for oral conditions asked if I could treat newborns with this condition," Dr. Stall says. "The first time I treated a child, it was the mom's fourth but the first with this problem. Once I did the release, the child nursed right away without causing mom the pain she previously had and also with better milk flow. It

was like night and day. The mom was thrilled."

On the initial visit to his office, Dr. Stall will interview the mother and have her fill out a questionnaire about the issues regarding her child's difficulty with breastfeeding. Upon examining the child and determining the baby indeed requires a tongue- or lip-tie release, he will explain in detail the simple procedure and what the small wound will look like.

"The parents usually want the procedure done that day," says Dr. Stall, who has undergone extensive training for the procedure. "We swaddle the baby in a blanket, place them in the chair, and use the laser to release the tie. It takes about 30 seconds."

From there, mother and child will go immediately into another room where she will get the baby to nurse.

"We encourage this because breast milk has lots of antibodies that promote healing," Dr. Stall adds. "Most babies take to the nursing right away. Some take a little longer. This is where the lactation consultant comes in, because I refer all mothers back to them."

Dr. Stall will also instruct the parents how to perform exercises on the treated area at home, such as stretching the lip in various ways and getting the baby to move its tongue around.

"The exercises are very important because we don't want the surgical site to close up and heal too fast," Dr. Stall says. "We want it to heal from the inside out."

Since 1985, Dr. Stall has been providing comprehensive general dentistry services for children and adults, including teeth cleanings, sealants, and tooth-colored fillings, as well as crowns, bridges, extrac-



tions, root canals, and dentures. He is also certified to do IV sedation in the office.

Dr. Stall graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine in 1983. As a resident at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City in 1984, he received additional training in general and hospital dentistry. In 1989, he received the prestigious Academy of General Dentistry Fellowship Award, given to dentists who have shown dedication to patient care through continuing education. He has taken more than 2000 hours of continuing dental education courses over the course of his career. In addition, he is a past clinical instructor in restorative and cosmetic dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania, and has come to mentor other dentists in areas relating to dental implants and restorative dentistry.

While Dr. Stall takes immense pride in the work he does to assist all his dental patients, there is understandably something particularly rewarding about performing a procedure that helps mother and child bond so closely.

"Some moms think they're doing something wrong and stop nursing," Dr. Stall says. "But bottles don't solve the problem; babies can get colic and gas. Sometimes, they put babies on medications they don't need. All they needed was a tongue-tie or lip-tie release." ■



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