



What is Congenital Torticollis?

CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARENTS

Torticollis is a congenital or acquired condition of limited neck motion. Your child will tend to hold her head tipped to one side with the chin pointing in the opposite direction. It is the result of tightness of the sternocleidomastoid neck muscle, which starts near the back of the ear and ends at the breast and collar bone. In early infancy, a firm, non-tender mass may sometimes be felt in the middle portion of the muscle. The mass will eventually go away, however the neck muscles can remain tight. If left untreated, there may be permanent limitation of neck movement as well as uneven development of movement and posture. There may be flattening of the head and face on the affected side.

How is Torticollis Treated?

Physical Therapy treatment with a home program of gentle stretching exercises is the most common and effective method of treatment. The exercises will help the baby turn the head toward the affected side and tilt the head away from the affected side. This will stretch the tight sternocleidomastoid muscle. In addition to stretching exercises, the following positioning suggestions will help prevent or improve the common head flattening associated with torticollis. Consistent follow through with your home program is essential.

Positioning Suggestions

Frequent change in your child's position is recommended. Examples are listed below to help improve your child's neck mobility and prevent or improve an abnormal head shape.

- Alternate the head position when placing baby to sleep.
- Alternate the end of the changing table. Position yourself so that your baby will look at you, moving the head in the less preferred direction.
- Position yourself when talking to your baby so that your baby will look at you, moving the head in the less preferred direction.
- Alternate the arm with which you carry and feed your baby.
- Carry and cuddle your baby with her face turning alternately right and left throughout the day.
- Ask your physical therapist to help you with car seat padding for symmetric posture.
- When your baby has good head control, consider purchase of a small seat, like the Bumbo chair. This will provide alternate positioning and decrease pressure on the back of the head.
- Practice lots of tummy time to decrease pressure on the back of the head.

The photos on the following page illustrate alternating play and carry head positions. You may receive a separate set of instructions for your child's specific home exercise program.



(c) January 2010. All rights reserved.
Rehabilitation / Physical Therapy Department