

Torticollis

What is torticollis?

Torticollis is a condition where the neck muscles are shortened or tightened on one side, causing the head to be tilted toward the tight side and turned toward the other side. Sometimes there is a lump felt in the muscle within the first month. Usually, the lump will disappear with time.

What causes torticollis?

Torticollis can be caused by various different factors. It may be caused by the baby's position in the womb. It may be caused by plagiocephaly when a baby has a flattened head shape or has a preference to keep their head turned to one side.

What do I do if my baby has torticollis?

Talk to your doctor about your concerns. They will usually recommend you **see a therapist who has been trained to treat torticollis**. If you need treatment, you can contact our intake team to make a referral.

How is torticollis treated?

There are three main treatments that physiotherapists use: positioning recommendations, tummy time, and strengthening/stretching exercises.

Positioning recommendations

- ✓ Position your baby in their crib so that they have to turn their head to their non-preferred side to look at you when you approach
- ✓ Place toys on the non-preferred side of your baby's head while playing. Mobiles are excellent for helping your baby look up with their head in the middle. Mirrors and colorful musical toys can be placed on their non-preferred side to encourage them to look in that direction. Never place toys in the crib; ensure they attach to the side and are crib-safe
- ✓ Alternate which end of the crib/change table your baby's head goes when they are lying on their back
- ✓ Consider positioning devices such as the Turtle hat, Love Nest pillow and Cradler head support to help your baby keep their head in the middle. These devices should only be used

with adult supervision and should not be used for sleeping. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines

- ✓ Alternate which arm you use to hold/feed your baby
- ✓ Avoid having your baby sleep in car seats or bouncy chairs/swings as this will encourage your baby's head to tilt to one side

Using baby equipment

- ✓ Limit time in baby equipment such as Jolly Jumpers or Exersaucers
- ✓ Wait until your baby is able to sit on their own before using them
- ✓ Playing on a play mat is the best way to promote baby's development

Positions for Play

- ✓ When your baby is awake, spend some **supervised** playtime in a side lying position: have your baby lay on their left or right side, with a roll behind their back providing additional support
- ✓ When awake and **supervised** place your baby on their tummy to play. By 3 months of age, your baby should be spending about one hour a day (in total) on their tummy to play. This can be done in short sessions, several times per day. There are many different ways to do tummy time. See our tummy time handout for more information
- ✓ Tummy time is important for your baby to develop head control and it helps your baby to strengthen their body to learn to crawl, sit and eventually walk

Strengthening and Stretching Neck Muscles

- ✓ A trained therapist can show you how to provide proper stretching and strengthening techniques to help decrease your baby's neck tightness
- ✓ If you need treatment, you can contact our intake team to make a referral

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