

What to do if your baby has torticollis

Some babies are born with a tight neck muscle that was caused by the way they were laying inside their mother's uterus. This condition is called *torticollis*. If your baby has torticollis, you may notice that he (or she):

- Has a tilted jaw or uneven mouth when crying
- Has slight flattening of the head on one side
- Keeps his head turned or tilted to one side
- Likes to breastfeed when laying on one side but not the other

These things usually go away in a few weeks, but there are steps you can take to help ensure that they do and that your baby doesn't develop a flat or misshapen head. Babies with torticollis may be at risk of developing flatness on one side of the head because their little neck muscles are tight on one side and weak on the other. Because of this tightness, they tend to keep their head in the same position when they are sleeping on their back. (Remember the pediatrician's advice: All infants—including those with torticollis—should be put to sleep on their back to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS!) The skull of a newborn is soft, so laying with the head always on the same side can cause flattening in some babies.

Steps to take

- When your baby is awake, play and talk to him when he is on his tummy. Do this as often during the day as you can!
- Put your baby in different positions in your arms, the crib, the swing, or when feeding, so that he practices turning his head in both directions.
- When not in the car, do not use the car seat too much as an infant seat or carrier.
- Talk to your baby's doctor if you think his condition is getting worse.
- With the pediatrician's approval and guidance, stretch the baby's neck muscles by doing the exercises described below four or five times a day. You should continue to do these until the baby is 1 year old, although in the later months you won't need to do them so often.

Neck-stretching exercises

1. Slowly *turn* the baby's head (chin to shoulder). Hold this position for 10 seconds. Then turn the head to the other side and hold for 10 seconds. Do this three times to each side.
2. Slowly *tilt* the baby's head (ear to shoulder). Hold for 10 seconds. Then tilt the head to the other side and hold for 10 seconds. Do this three times to each side.

Remember, babies should always *sleep* on their back.

Adapted from the University of California, San Diego, division of neonatology patient handout, "Neck Exercises for Babies with Torticollis"

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