

Congenital Torticollis (Right side)

Information for Parents

Congenital Torticollis is a common condition affecting babies in their first few weeks. It presents as a tilting and rotation of the head and neck that is caused by tightness in the neck muscles. There may sometimes be a lump in the neck, which usually reaches maximum size within the first month and then gradually gets smaller. Your baby's head will tend to tilt towards the affected side, but they will look or turn away from it. The following positional techniques and stretches will help to correct this and stretch your baby's muscles.



Treatment advice

Positioning

Tummy time (when your child is awake) is really important to strengthen your baby's neck and enhance developmental skills. Set aside time every day to actively play with your baby on their tummy. Encourage them to look up and especially to the left. Make sure their elbows are under their shoulders so they can prop themselves up. You can put a rolled up towel under their chest to help.

Position your child's car seat so the window is on their right hand side so they are encouraged to look towards the light on the right.

Encourage your baby to turn towards the affected side with play, toys, feeding, etc. You could also move their cot so they have to look right to see you.

When holding your baby against your shoulder, put them on your left as they will turn to the right to look around and your cheek will prevent them turning to the left.

Stretching

You will be taught the stretches below by a Physiotherapist, it is very important that you carry them out at home several times each day.

Do the stretches slowly. Your baby may resist due to frustration or tightness but they will not hurt them



Side bending

1. Hold your baby's right shoulder down and hold their head with your right hand. Gently but firmly side bend the head to your baby's left side (ear to shoulder). Hold this position for 10–15 seconds and repeat regularly during the day.
2. Hold your baby in your arms on their side with their head in the crook of your right elbow, and facing away from you. Use your right arm to tilt their left ear up towards their left shoulder whilst holding their body still. Hold this position for 10–15 seconds and repeat regularly during the day.



Some other carrying positions are shown below:



Rotation

1. Hold your baby's left shoulder down and gently turn their head as far as you can to the right. Hold this position for 10–15 seconds and repeat regularly during the day.
2. Sit your baby on your lap facing away from you. Hold their left shoulder steady so that their body will not twist when you move their head. Gently turn their head to the right. Hold this position for 10–15 seconds and repeat regularly during the day.
You can also do this stretch against your body, with baby facing you and their left cheek against your cheek or chest as shown below.



3. Encouraging your baby to actively look to the right will help to improve movement and stretch their neck muscles, as shown in the picture below:



Congenital Torticollis and Plagiocephaly

Torticollis can sometimes be associated with plagiocephaly which is when your baby's skull becomes flattened due to moulding at the back or on one side. This is purely cosmetic, there are no other symptoms and it does not affect your baby's brain.

If relevant, your Physiotherapist will give you further information regarding this.

Feeding Advice

If your baby is bottle fed we would advise trying to feed them in your right arm with the bottle held in your left hand. This will encourage them to look to the left. If you are breast feeding we would advise that you continue feeding from both sides although may want to try different holds that may still help encourage your baby to turn to the left.

Further Advice

If you feel the problem is getting worse or you feel like you are not managing the stretches, please contact the physiotherapy department on the details below.

Contact Telephone Numbers

If you have any concerns, contact:

Physiotherapy Team
Therapies Department,
Royal Hospital for Children and Young People,
50 Little France Crescent
Edinburgh
EH16 4SA

Telephone 0131 3121079