

## What is torticollis?

It is a condition (also known as 'wryneck') in which the baby's head is tilted. The head often rotates towards one shoulder and tilts away to the opposite side.

The term 'congenital' is also sometime used when describing torticollis. This means that it is present at or shortly after birth. Babies treated early with physiotherapy programmes usually respond well to treatment.

## What causes torticollis?

Congenital torticollis occurs when the muscles (sternocleidomastoid) on one side of the neck are shortened. This is what makes the baby's head tilt to one side and/or rotate.

Experts are uncertain as to the cause of torticollis. It seems likely that it relates to a baby's posture in the womb before delivery or during delivery. It can be treated with early positioning following physiotherapy advice.

## What are the signs and symptoms of torticollis?

You will notice that your baby keeps their head towards one side all the time. You may feel a lump on the muscle at the side of the neck. Different words are used to describe this like sternocleidomastoid tumour. Do not worry about this phrase - it relates to a tight muscle mass. The baby's head may be flattened as a result of remaining in one position - this may be called 'plagiocephally'.

## How is torticollis diagnosed?

You or a health professional may notice that your baby is holding their head in a certain position. An examination will be carried out to rule out other conditions - occasionally an ultrasound scan or x-ray may be requested. At this stage, you may be referred to a physiotherapist.

## How is it treated?

The physiotherapist will examine your baby. He/ she will teach you exercises that will consist of an all-day positioning programme and gentle stretches (see next pages of this handout).

You can also play with your baby in ways that stretch the neck eg. by placing toys on the opposite side to encourage turning of the head the other way. The therapist will teach you positions to place your baby in that will help the torticollis.

The therapist will monitor your baby's progress and continue to assess and treat as necessary. This may include looking at how your baby's movement is developing.



A head hugger is used to keep the baby's head in midline during the day. It should **NOT** be used at night time due to over heating

If you have any questions, please ask your physiotherapist.

## Torticollis with neck rotation towards the left



Hold your baby with their head resting on your right forearm.  
Support the body with your left arm.  
Hold the baby's body in close to yours.

**Aim:** Stretch neck towards the left



Hold your baby on your lap so he/she has to work to turn towards you.

**Aim:** Neck rotation toward the right



When your baby is resting on you, place him/her so that his/her head is resting on the left cheek

**Aim:** Encourage head to turn towards the right



When your baby is over your shoulder, help him/her to turn towards the right

**Aim:** Encourage head turn towards the right