

Torticollis (left)

What is torticollis?

Torticollis (tor-tih-kol-is) is a neck deformity. The sternocleidomastoid muscle (ster-no-klie-do-mass-toyed, also called SCM muscle) is shorter than normal. This causes the head to tilt toward the side of the short muscle, and rotate toward the other side. The head and face may be asymmetrical (the right and left sides look different).

What causes torticollis?

It can occur because of illness or injury affecting the muscles. Some babies are born with it for reasons unknown.

How can I help my child?

Physical therapy is the primary treatment. After assessing your child, a physical therapist will plan a home program for you to follow. This will include simple daily exercises to help stretch and strengthen muscles, as well as improve posture, alignment, symmetry, and motor skills. You'll also learn how to hold, feed, and position your child for everyday activities so that the preferred head and neck position can change over time.

The therapist will act as your consultant, setting up a check-in schedule and discussing your child's goals and progress with you. All caregivers at home or in day care should follow this program to ensure your child's progress.

The following activities can help stretch the short muscles and strengthen the weak muscles. This sheet is to be used as a guide for daily exercises and techniques at home or in a day care setting. Your child's therapist will check which exercises you should do for your child. Do only the checked exercises. **This program should be used only under the guidance of a physical therapist.**

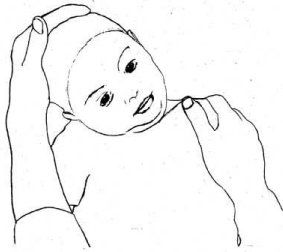
Stretching exercises

Tips:

- Set aside the same time of day for the exercises, so they become part of the daily routine.
- Try to make exercise fun. Talk, play music, or sing to your child.
- All handholds should be gentle.
- Stretch should be gentle, steady, and slow.
- Once resistance is felt, push no further.
- Quality of stretch is more important than quantity.
- If your child fusses, stop and calm the child before continuing with exercise.
- Be consistent with the program to ensure the most benefit.

Neck lateral tilt

1. Place child flat on the floor. Hold the left shoulder.
2. Using fingertips, slowly and gently tilt the right ear toward the right shoulder.
3. Do not lift the head off the floor.
4. Hold ____ seconds.
Repeat ____ times.
Do ____ sessions per day.



Neck rotation

1. Place the child flat on the floor.
2. Hold the right shoulder securely.
3. Put your hand on the back of the head.
4. Gently turn the face toward the left shoulder.
5. Hold ____ seconds.
Repeat ____ times.
Do ____ sessions per day.



Combination neck-tilt, rotation, and forward flexion

1. Place the child flat on the floor.
2. Stabilize the child's chest with your left hand.
3. Place your right hand behind the head.
4. Tilt head to right side and rotate face to the left shoulder while tucking the chin.
5. Hold ____ seconds.
Repeat ____ times.
Do ____ sessions per day.



Shoulder flexion

1. Lay the child flat on the floor.
2. Apply steady, gentle pressure to the chest at the left shoulder.
3. Keeping the child's palm turned toward his or her head, lift the left arm up and over head.
4. Do not let the elbow bend.
5. Hold ____ seconds.
Repeat ____ times.
Do ____ sessions per day.



Activities and positioning

The following are strategies for positioning and activities to change your child's preferred head and neck position. Consistency is **very** important to achieve optimal results. **The goal is to bring the world to your child's left side.**

Carrying

Tip your child's body to the left side to encourage head-tilting to the right side. Do this when carrying your child. This will strengthen the neck muscle on the right side.



Carry your child at your right shoulder so he or she must lift the head upright and look to the left. Provide support to your child at the mid-back by supporting into your shoulder or chest.

Positioning

When positioned on the back, your child's body should be centered and balanced to keep the head from tipping. To help your baby stay centered, give light pressure at mid-chest toward the support surface. Your therapist may add support to your child's car seat and/or infant seat to help keep the body evenly balanced.



Place the crib so that your child must look to the left to see you and hear you as you enter the room. Use this position with the infant seat, high chair, swing, or other devices.

Feeding

Hold the child on your right side when bottle feeding, so he or she must turn to the left to look at you. If you are nursing, continue to feed from both sides but be aware your child may have more trouble on your right side.

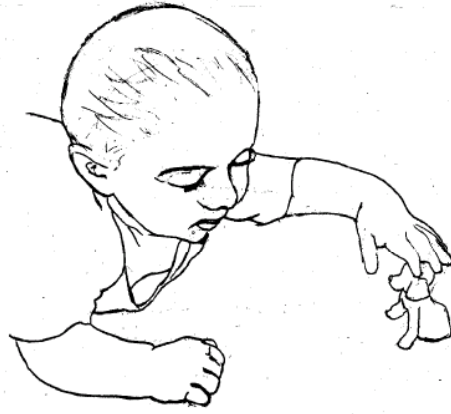
Activities

It is **very** important that your child spend time playing on his tummy each day. Encourage your child to raise his head and look straight ahead. Also encourage reaching and looking to the left.



Have your child play while lying on her left side. Encourage her to lift her head up from the surface. Provide gentle pressure to her right shoulder or hip to help her feel secure. Keep your touch light so as not to prevent movements during play.

Play games that encourage your child to reach with the left arm.



Move your child from left side-lying to left side-sitting by giving gentle downward pressure on the right thigh and lower leg.

Questions?

This home program is to be used only under the guidance of a physical therapist. If you have any questions or concerns, please call your physical therapist in the Developmental and Rehabilitation Services Department.

Therapist signature

Date

Phone

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