

Torticollis Information Sheet

What is Torticollis?

Normally a baby is able to move their head freely to both sides. Torticollis is a condition where the child holds their head tilted or rotated to one particular side. When a baby has Torticollis, their sternocleidomastoid muscle in their neck becomes shortened and tight causing the movement in the neck to be limited.

Sometimes when the sternocleidomastoid muscle becomes short and tight a hard lump occurs on the neck. This lump is fibrous tissue within the muscle which usually disappears over time.

Occasionally the baby's head may become asymmetrical or flattened on one side due to them looking one way more than the other. This will usually resolve once the torticollis has been treated.

What causes Torticollis?

The condition does not always have a clear cause but Torticollis can be caused by the following:

- Difficulties during birth eg. Breech delivery
- Congenital abnormalities having an effect eg. Dislocated hips
- Positioning of the head in the womb

How is Torticollis treated?

Torticollis is usually treated through intervention from a physiotherapist. Your physiotherapist will provide stretches to complete with your baby every nappy change to lengthen the sternocleidomastoid muscle and improve movement within the neck.

Your physiotherapist will also provide positioning advice for your baby. Such as placing toys and stimuli on the opposite side to which the baby prefers to look. This encourages the baby to turn their head the other way and stretch the neck muscles itself. It is also recommended that you encourage lots of tummy time so that the baby is able to improve its head control and allows it to have a short period of time without pressure on the back of its head, this is especially important if they have head asymmetry/flattening.

You should consider the position in which you place your baby in their cot to the side of the room the door is on or the side that you sleep. You should position the baby so that they have to turn their head to the non-preferred direction to see you coming in the room or to see you when you're talking to them.

You should also consider the position in which you feed your baby. Make sure to alternate the arm that holds the baby so that you are encouraging them to turn their heads both directions to be able to feed.