



Understanding torticollis and plagiocephaly and what you can do at home.



What is Torticollis?

- Torticollis describes when a neck muscle is tighter on one side of the neck than the other. This can cause a baby to have a preference to turn their head to one side, tilt their head, or both
- The cause is usually unknown, but it may be related to positioning in the womb, use of forceps or vacuum assist at time of delivery, or a symptom of another underlying condition
- If torticollis is not addressed, it can quickly lead to a secondary condition called plagiocephaly. It may also affect how a baby learns to move.



Preference to turn to the left and tilt to the right

What is Plagiocephaly?

- Plagiocephaly describes when a baby's skull becomes flattened, usually on one side, due to increased pressure on that part of the head. It may also cause uneven ears, bulging of one side of the forehead or facial asymmetry.
- It is possible for a baby to have plagiocephaly without torticollis and vice versa.
- For both conditions, the earlier that caregivers can start with simple interventions at home to address the issue, the better.



Flat spot developing on the back right

What can I do at home?

Take note of which way your baby prefers to turn their head. Observe if their head shape is already becoming more flat on that side as well. We will refer to this as their **'preferred side.'**

Now we will go through some simple play and positioning tips you can get started with at home.

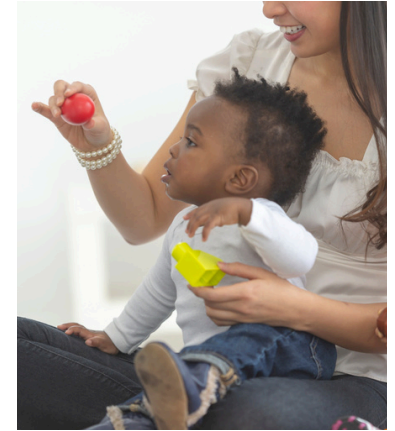


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Tip #1 - Encourage your baby to **turn their head to their less-preferred side** during **play time** and **daily routines**

- Spend time playing with your baby and strategically place motivating toys, people and/or pets to their less-preferred side. Encourage them to rotate and hold their head that way for as long as they are able. Try this in a variety of positions several times a day (on their tummy, supported sitting, side-lying, supported kneeling).



- Think about daily routines such as diaper changes, feeding, carrying them and consider how you may be able to encourage them to turn their head to their less-preferred side during that routine by either changing their position or adjusting your position.





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Tip #2 - Increase tummy time and **decrease** time spent on their back as much as possible.

- By 2-3 months, babies should be spending 30-60 minutes a day doing supervised tummy time play activities, and by 6 months this should increase to 60-90 minutes.
- There are a variety of ways you can do tummy time with your baby, such as chest to chest, over your legs, getting down on the floor with them, or using an exercise ball.



- If your baby has already developed a flat spot, keep pressure off the side that is flatter as much as possible. This will allow it to round out as they grow.
- Avoid the use of baby swings, bouncy seats and car seats as much as possible.
- If needed, consider using an infant carrier or an upseat as they approach 4-6 months of age. These types of positioning devices keep pressure off the back of the head.

Always follow safe sleep guidelines. If baby is a deep sleeper, you may try gently turning their head to less-preferred side before you go to sleep. Also make sure you are placing them in their crib so they are encouraged to look to their less-preferred side to see you.





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Cranial Remolding Helmets

- If your baby's head shape does not seem to be improving with early positioning strategies or they have a very noticeable asymmetrical head shape, you may consider helmet therapy as an option. Usually helmet therapy is recommended around 4-6 months of age, but can still be started later as well.
- Helmet therapy is not covered by OHIP. Some insurance companies may offer financial support with a physician's prescription. A helmet costs around \$3,000. It needs to be worn for 23hrs/day, usually for 2-4 months.
- An orthotist custom molds a helmet for your baby and sees your baby frequently for the duration of their helmet therapy to make adjustments as your baby's head shape changes.
- You can book an assessment with an orthotist to receive more information and often complete an initial 3D scan, which will help determine the severity of your baby's head shape and guide the decision to move forward with a helmet or not. It is up to the caregiver if they wish to pursue a helmet.

Local Orthotists that offer cranial remolding therapy:

- Biodesign (Brantford): <https://biodesign.ca/>
- The Head Shape Clinic (Ancaster): <https://www.rokbandclinics.ca/>
- Guelph Orthotics (Cambridge): <https://www.guelphorthotics.com/>
- Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre (Hamilton) *Note - Ron Joyce requires referral from physician*: <https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/areas-of-care/rehabilitation/outpatient/prosthetics-orthotics/>

