

Neck Stretching Exercises for Torticollis

Your child was born with a condition known as Congenital Muscular Torticollis (CMT). You may also hear it called “twisted neck” or “wry neck” condition. CMT causes abnormal tightness in your baby’s neck muscles that pulls the head to one side and limits head and neck movement. Sometimes a lump is also seen on the neck. In most cases, it can easily be treated with physical therapy and daily exercises.

What You Need To Know

CMT can occur for several reasons:

- Poor positioning of head and neck in the uterus during pregnancy
- Trauma to baby’s neck muscles during birth, such as brachial nerve plexus injury
- Problems with the position or development of the spine or neck bones during pregnancy
- Family history of torticollis conditions

Testing

Your baby’s doctor will give an exam and may order tests, such as x-rays, to check the position of bones in the spine and neck. Ultrasound may also be used to check your baby’s condition.

More on next page →

Learn more about your health care.



Treatment

Most babies are treated with daily neck stretching exercises and positioning therapy. For most babies, these activities will correct the muscles in the neck within the first year or life. For more severe cases, orthotics or surgery may be needed. Your baby will be checked for improvement in range of motion at well baby exams or visits with a physical therapist.

Neck Stretching Exercises

You will be shown by your baby's doctor or physical therapist how to do these exercises. Each exercise should be done **5 times a day or with each diaper change** until your baby has a normal range of motion.

Your baby may get fussy during these exercises, and rest breaks may be needed between each exercise, but they will help to improve range of motion.

Left and Right Range of Motion Exercise

Repeat exercise _____ times.

Place one hand on your child's chest. Place the other hand on the side of your child's face. Gently, but firmly, from right to left turn the head so that the chin moves toward the shoulder. Turn the head only to the point where it becomes firm, hold for 10 seconds and then release. Repeat the exercise, turning the head from the left to the right, so that the chin moves toward the other shoulder.

Head to Shoulder Range of Motion Exercise

Repeat exercise _____ times.

Place one hand on your child's upper chest and shoulder so that the body does not move. Hold the top of your child's head with the other hand. Gently, but firmly, tilt the head so that the ear moves toward the shoulder. Press only to the point where it becomes firm, hold 10 seconds and then release. Switch hands and repeat the exercise, tilting the head to the opposite side with the ear moving toward the shoulder.

For More Information

Talk with your child's doctor or physical therapist if you have questions or concerns about how to do these exercises or about your child's condition.