



Right congenital torticollis

7 tips to treat your child

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What is muscular congenital torticollis?

Muscular congenital torticollis (MCT) is a problem with the head positioning due to muscle tension in the sterno-cleido-mastoid (SCM) muscle. This muscle begins at the clavicle and inserts itself at the base of the skull. When there is an increased muscle tension, the head will incline itself to the side of tension and it will rotate in the opposite direction. In some cases, there could be a palpable mass in the muscle.

There are many factors that can cause the child to adopt this specific head posture. MCT is also often associated with a plagiocephaly (ex a right torticollis and a left plagiocephaly) since the child keeps its head turned (to the left in this case) for a large part of the day. This can be explained by the fact that the bones of the skull of an infant are soft and therefore can become deformed with a prolonged pressure on the same side. It has been shown in studies, however, that a child that is treated quickly has a better prognosis. The at-home exercise program is the best solution to be able to prevent permanent deformation.

The physiotherapist will be the one to teach you this program. They will also teach you which positions to place your child in throughout the day to prevent the head from always being placed on the same side.



At home exercise program

Try to integrate these exercises in your daily routine! They can be done at every diaper change or after every feeding, etc. You can see what works best for your family.

1) Lateral side flexion neck stretch

Place your child on their back:

- With one hand under your child's head, bring their left ear towards their left shoulder while your second hand stabilizes the right shoulder.
- Hold the stretch for 10 seconds.
- Take a 10 second pause.
- Repeat 5 times.
- Repeat the exercise completely twice a day.



In your arms:

- Place your child in your arms with their back against your stomach. Their right ear should be resting on your arm. Gently bring their left ear towards their shoulder while stabilizing their right shoulder. This position will create a stretch on the right side of their neck.
- Tip: This exercise can be done in front of a mirror. This will allow the child to observe themselves which can be amusing and will allow you to ensure that your child is positioned well.
- Hold the stretch for 10 seconds.
- Take a 10 second pause.
- Repeat 5 times.
- Repeat the exercise completely twice a day.



The exercises should be done gently and pain-free.

2) Right rotation neck stretch

On their back:

- Place your hand on your child's left temple and gently turn the head to bring their right ear towards the mat.
- At the same time, stabilize the left shoulder to restrict the baby from lifting.
- Hold the stretch for 10 seconds.
- Take a 10 second pause.
- Repeat 5 times.
- Repeat the exercise completely twice a day.



3) Lateral side flexion neck strengthening exercise

In your arms:

- Gently bring your child into a right inclined position.
- They will naturally bring their head upwards creating a left lateral side flexion.
- Hold this position until your child fatigues.

On your thighs or on a Suisse ball:

- Same principle as the previous exercise.

On their side:

- Place your child on its affected side. They should lift their head to make it easier to play.
- You can then place a rolled towel behind their back to be able to maintain this position on their side.
- Hold this position until your child fatigues.



The exercises should be done gently and pain-free.

4) Right rotation neck strengthening exercise

On their back, stomach or sitting:

- Try to make your child look towards the right by placing toys on their right side. This will encourage them to turn their head to the right.



5) Positioning throughout the day:

- Try to reposition their head straight as much as possible during the day. You can place towels or pillow around their head in their stroller or car seat to ensure the head position is kept.
** Please remove if the car seat is placed in a moving vehicle*
- When you put your child to bed, place their head in the position that motivates them to turn to the right to look at you when you enter their room.



6) Global motor development

- Place your child frequently on his stomach under supervision while they are awake. This will strengthen the muscles of their neck and back and help prevent a plagiocephaly (flattening of the head). You can also try to position yourself at their level to encourage them to lift their head to look up at you. You can also place them on you.
- You can also help your child maintain the position on their stomach by placing a small rolled up towel under their armpits. On their back, encourage your child to grab their feet. Make sure his head is centered. This will strengthen their abdominal muscles.
- Practice rolling with your child towards both directions. You can help them by moving their pelvis. Practice these to allow them to roll from their back to their stomach and vice versa.
- Encourage your child to use both hands to play. A child with a torticollis can neglect his hand on the affected side since it is easier for them to play with the one they see more (left hand).

The exercises should be done gently and pain-free.



7) Exercises for plagiocephaly (flattening of the head)

It often happens that a baby with a torticollis will develop a flattening of the side of the head (plagiocephaly) which is most often in contact with a solid surface. In case of a right torticollis, the left side of the head will be flattened. Depending on the severity, there may be an asymmetry of the forehead and the ears can potentially be positioned unequally. This is not dangerous for their development, but is more aesthetically bothersome. The head shape can create some problems if their child needs to wear a helmet later on, for example. Plagiocephaly is usually reversible with positioning exercises. If the plagiocephaly is important, your physiotherapist may recommend a head orthosis. Since a baby's head grows between 4 and 9 months, your therapist may ask for the orthosis as early as 4 months so that the procedure is as effective as possible.

****The purpose of these exercises is to decrease the pressure of the affected side of your child's skull by increasing the pressure on the healthy side. ****

Position of your child:

On their side:

- While your child is awake, try to place them on their right side while playing. This ensures that there is a pressure on the right side of their head. You can also place a rolled towel behind their back to keep this position. This position can also help strengthen the left side of their neck.

On their stomach:

- This will be the same principle as the exercise for torticollis explained above.

On their back:

- Place their toys to the right of them to draw their attention to the right and allow them to turn their head to that side.

In their crib:

- You can position your child with their head turned to the right. Also, place your child so that they look to the right when you enter their room and have a view of their room.



Conclusion

You currently have multiple exercises at your disposition to improve your child's congenital muscular torticollis.

However, the best way to ensure that you have the best treatment for your child, would be to contact a highly qualified physiotherapist from an Action Sport Physio clinic. They can coach you through the treatment to ensure the problem is taken care of properly!

Call an Action Sport Physio clinic to schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

*Consult our videos and articles
on the well-being of your children.*

