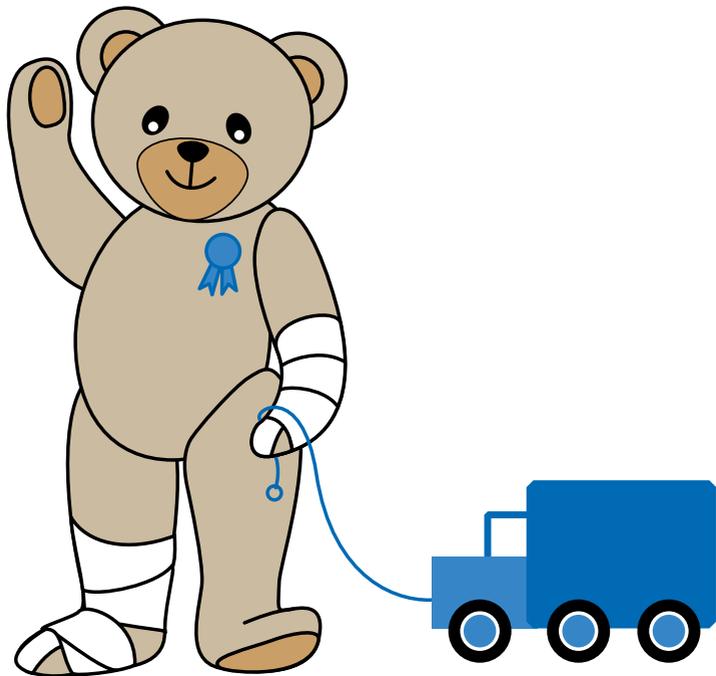


# Left Torticollis

Physiotherapy Department



Patient information leaflet

The aim of this information booklet is to provide information to parents of children with torticollis. It also describes exercises, stretches and activities to help your child.

This information booklet should only be given after assessment by a Physiotherapist. The physiotherapist will demonstrate the individual exercises appropriate for your child. This booklet can be used as reference and a reminder of what you were taught by your physiotherapist. It will help you manage your child's condition.

## What is torticollis?

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Torticollis describes an asymmetrical neck position. It usually involves a muscle in the neck called the sternocleidomastoid muscle. Your baby will prefer to lie with their head tilted to the left and their face turned to the right. You may hear it referred to as Congenital Muscular Torticollis, this means it was present at or shortly after birth.

## What causes torticollis?

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There are various causes of torticollis. This leaflet covers the muscular torticollis for which you have been referred to a physiotherapist.

The most common cause of torticollis is a shortening in the sternocleidomastoid muscle. Some people believe it may be caused by trauma at the time of your baby's birth, others think it may be due to the position your baby adopted in utero.

In about 20% of cases you can feel a lump in the muscle. This is called a sternocleidomastoid tumour (don't worry this is just a phrase, nothing to do with cancer). No one is certain what causes the lump. It normally appears when the baby is 2-3 weeks old and usually disappears by age 1.

The sternocleidomastoid muscle has 2 parts. One part comes from the sternum (breastbone) and one from the clavicle (collarbone). These attach to the skull behind the ear. If there is tightness in the muscles it will cause your baby's head to tilt in one direction and turn in another. For example babies with left torticollis often tilt their head to the left, and look to the right.



## **Why do we treat torticollis?**

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If it was left untreated your baby's range of movement at the neck would become restricted.

Babies have soft skulls and lying with their head in one direction all the time can cause flattening of the skull on the side to which they are turned. This is called plagiocephaly. Up to the age of 1 year we can influence your baby's head shape by positioning.

Any head tilt which is not corrected as a baby will become more obvious as your child grows and starts to sit and stand.

## **What does the treatment involve?**

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Torticollis is best treated by continual management with day to day positioning and handling of your baby, as well as a few specific stretches taught by a physiotherapist. The initial goal is to keep your baby's head in the middle without any tilt or rotation. We also encourage your baby to turn their head in the opposite direction to how they like to hold it.

Following are some descriptions of optimal positioning. During the day try and implement these frequently into your baby's routine. Your physiotherapist will tick the ones that are appropriate for your baby.

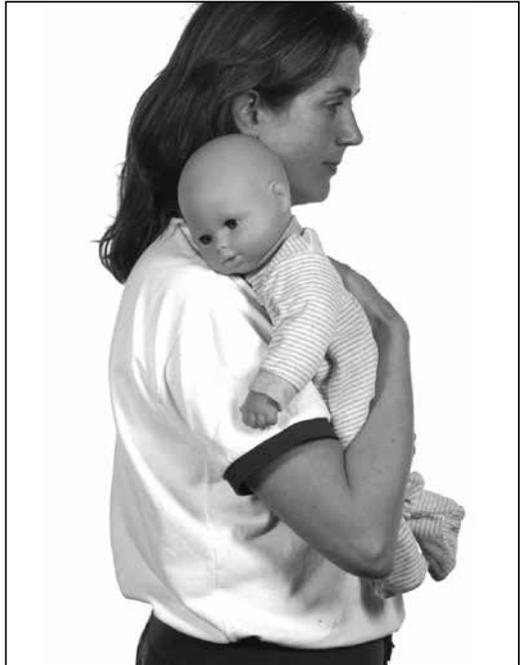
## Carrying

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1. Carry your baby on their side facing outwards over your left forearm as shown in the picture below. Encourage them to tilt their head to the right, bringing their right ear to their right shoulder.



2. Carry your baby up against your right shoulder so they look outwards and therefore to the left.



## Laying down

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1. Lie your baby on their back and encourage them to turn their head to the left using favourite toys, your voice, a sibling, light, or TV etc.. Any time they are lying down, e.g. in their cot, try to approach them from the left so they will look to find you.

2. Lie your baby on their tummy with their head turned to the left. You can roll a blanket or towel and put it under the baby's chest to slightly elevate their head. They should tolerate the time better with this easy adjustment! Please remember that all tummy



time should be supervised. Ideally you would work up to half of baby's playtime on their tummy. Start with small amounts of time e.g. 30 seconds every hour, and work your way up.

3. Lie your baby on their left side with a towel under their head. This will encourage them to tilt to the right. Take the towel out when not supervised.



## Sitting

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1. Place padding along the left side of their head to 'prop' their head in a neutral position. This will stop them tilting to the left.



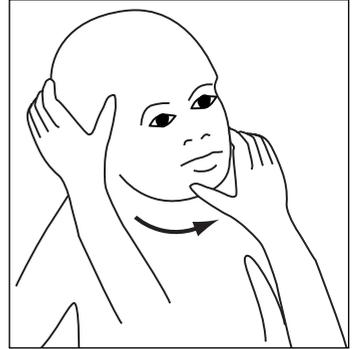
2. Roll a towel into the car seat to provide support and keep your baby's head in the middle. This will stop them turning to the right and tilting to the left.



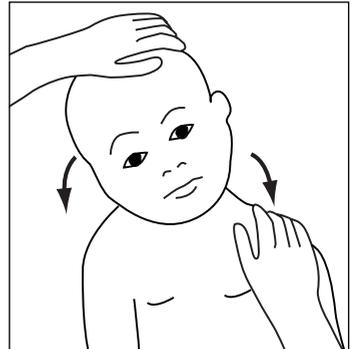
## Specific stretches

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1. Either lying on their back, lying on their tummy or being held by someone else on their shoulder – gently hold your baby’s head and turn it to the left. Aim to get their chin over their shoulder. Look how far they can look over the right side and aim for the same range of movement. Hold stretch for 20 seconds and repeat 5 times.



2. Either lying on their back, lying on their tummy or being held by someone else on their shoulder – gently place one hand on your baby’s left shoulder and with the other hand, hold your baby’s head and tilt it to the right. Aim to get their ear to their shoulder. Look how far they can tilt to the left and aim for the same range of movement. Hold stretch for 20 seconds and repeat 5 times.



**For further information, please do not hesitate to contact your physiotherapist.**

## Reference sources

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[www.orthoseek.com/topics.html](http://www.orthoseek.com/topics.html)

## Contact details

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We hope this information has been helpful to you. If you require further information, please call:

**Physiotherapy Department:** 01483 464153

**Hascombe Ward:** 01483 464071

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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Future review date: September 2020

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