

Torticollis & Plagiocephaly

What is Torticollis?

Torticollis is a condition in which muscles in the neck become tight. A child may be born with it or acquire it early in life. Tightness in neck muscles typically causes the child to favor rotating their head to look one direction and tilting their head towards the shoulder in the opposite direction of the head turn.

- **What to look for?**
 - The first major sign that parents and physicians notice is a head-turning preference. Consider the following questions: Does your child only turn his/her head in one direction? If you approach your child from the side, will he/she turn his/her head symmetrically to follow you?
 - If you notice your child favoring looking in one direction, contact your child's pediatrician. He or she can determine if your child has torticollis and if a referral to physical therapy is appropriate.

What is Plagiocephaly?

Plagiocephaly is characterized as a flattening on one side of the head, which occurs when a child places frequent pressure on one area while the skull is still malleable. It is commonly associated with Torticollis, resulting in a flattening on the side the child rotates the head towards. Some children present with a uniform flattening on the back of the head from frequent positioning on the back without presence of Torticollis.

- **What to look for?**
 - Exam your child's head for presence of asymmetry. If you note an area that concerns you, contact your child's pediatrician for an evaluation.

Ways to Prevent Torticollis/Plagiocephaly

- **Tummy time!**
 - Supervised tummy time is important for strengthening neck, upper body, and core muscles
 - Start with frequent, short sessions and gradually increased duration as your baby becomes more comfortable
- **Don't forget about lying on each side!**
 - You can also position your child on each side and place toys in front of him/her
 - This promotes lateral strengthening and bring hands together at midline
- **Alternate which end of the crib you lay your child in**
 - This promotes active rotation in each direction when visually exploring his/her environment
- **Alternate which arm you carry them in**
 - This also promotes active rotation in each direction to see what is around or when looking at you
- **Alternate the direction and position you are holding the baby during feedings**