Positioning Protocol For Torticollis and Plagiocephally

Frequent changes in your child’s position are recommended. Examples are listed below to help improve your child’s neck mobility to prevent or to improve an abnormal head shape. If your child’s head shape fails to improve by 3 to 4 months of age, contact your doctor.

1. Alternate the end of the crib in which you place your baby to sleep.
2. Alternate the end of the changing table in which you place your child’s head. If you stand or sit at the end of your baby for diaper changes, position yourself slightly off to the side and alternate sides to encourage your baby to move his or her head.
3. Place toys on the side of the stroller, swing, crib, or infant seat where neck rotation is most limited.
4. Alternate the hip or arm with which you carry your baby. You may notice some fussing and irritability at first because your baby will have to turn in the direction of the neck restriction, but the fussiness will decrease with time.
5. Perform both sets of neck-stretching exercises (see Neck Stretching Exercises for Torticollis protocol) at each diaper change, as prescribed by your doctor.
6. Attempt to interact with your child on the side where neck movement is limited.
7. A cushioned head support may be necessary to support your baby’s neck when he or she is in the car seat. Infants tend to scrunch up and turn to the side of least resistance.
8. Provide supervised "tummy time" daily while your baby is awake. Initially, babies often cry and resist this position. Start with just a minute or two of tummy time and gradually increase it as your baby learns to tolerate it. Tummy time will help improve your child's muscle strength and development.

This information is designed for general guidelines only. Your physician may modify these guidelines for your child. If you have specific questions about these instructions or concerns regarding your child's care, contact your physician.

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Neck-Stretching Exercises for Torticollis

Neck-stretching exercises have been recommended for your child because he or she has tightness in his or her neck muscles that is limiting neck movement. These exercises should be performed with each diaper change, or at least 5 times a day, until your child's neck has a normal range of motion.

Exercise 1. The first exercise is designed to improve rotation of your child's head to the right and left. Place one hand on your child's chest. Place the other hand on the side of your child's face. Gently but firmly turn the head so that the chin moves toward the shoulder. Turn the head only to the point of resistance, hold for 10 seconds, and release. Switch hands and repeat the same steps, turning the head to the shoulder in opposite direction.

Exercise 2. The second exercise is designed to improve bending of your child's head to the side. Place one hand on your child's upper chest and shoulder area so that his or her body does not move. Hold the top of your child's head with the other hand. Gently but firmly tilt the head to the side, pressing the ear toward the shoulder. Press only to the point of resistance, hold 10 seconds, and release. Switch hands and repeat the same steps, tilting the opposite ear to the shoulder. During the exercises that move the tight area of your child's neck, your child will fuss and squirm. However, consistent use of these exercises gradually will improve your child's neck mobility.

Exercise 1. Child undergoing exercise with face looking toward shoulder.

Exercise 2. Child undergoing exercise with ear tilting toward shoulder.

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