

Congenital Muscular Torticollis

What is congenital muscular torticollis (CMT)?

Congenital means it was present at birth. Torticollis means twisted neck. CMT is a shortened neck muscle that makes the neck twist. It happens on one side. With CMT the head usually tilts to one side and the face turns to the opposite side (see picture).

A child with torticollis is at risk for having flat areas on the skull and face. Facial features may be uneven. They are also at risk for vision problems and developmental delays.



What causes it?

A neck muscle called the sternocleidomastoid (SCM) is shortened (see picture), or tight. The exact reason for the shortened muscle is not known. **It is thought to be** due to the position of the baby during before, during or right after delivery.

How is it treated?

Treatment should start as soon as the problem is found.

- A physical therapist will teach you exercises to do with your child. The exercises include gentle stretching of the short, tight neck muscles. You will learn activities to strengthen the weak neck muscles.
- Therapy will help your child develop motor skills for their age.
- It is important to do tummy time every day. It should be done while your child is awake and supervised. Your child should play on their tummy 4 to 5 times, or more each day.

If stretching and strengthening starts at an early age and is done correctly, it may prevent lasting side effects. Early physical therapy, playtime working on neck mobility, and aggressive repositioning normally corrects the condition.

When should surgery be done?

Surgery is rarely needed. It may be needed if your child is over 1 year of age and has not improved with the exercises.

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ALERT: Call your child's doctor or physical therapist if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.