

Congenital Muscular Torticollis

Torticollis, which is commonly referred to as wry neck, is a type of condition in which a baby's head is tilted. The chin will point to one shoulder and the head will tilt to the opposing shoulder. Treatment is required to prevent the face and skull from growing unevenly and to prevent a limited range of movement for the neck. Congenital signifies a condition that is present when born, so this condition occurs at or close to the time of the baby's birth.

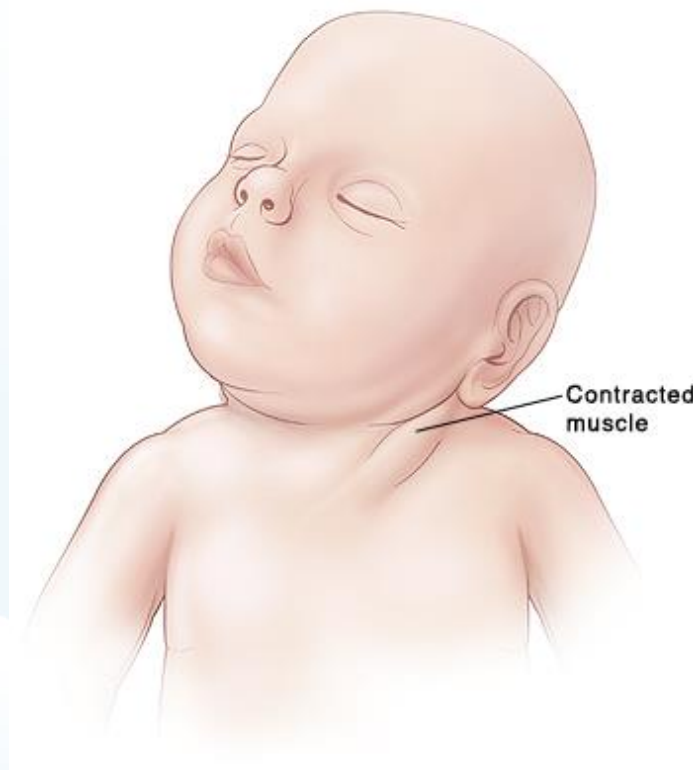
The cause of congenital torticollis are unknown, but it is believed that twisting to the neck during the birth process as the baby travels along the birth canal might be one explanation. Other explanations include the baby being squashed in a small uterus, which is more common in first-born children where the uterus has not been pre-stretched. Also babies who are in the breech position may get torticollis.

Signs of Congenital Torticollis

The most common sign will be visible, you will see the neck and head do not look straight. However, this is usually in severe cases. In mild cases the head will appear straight. Therefore another way to know if there is a mild torticollis is first to consider the history. Was there any trauma during birth? Did the baby have difficulty coming out and require pulling from the midwife, or instruments to assist the birth? Another sign will be when the baby does not look to one side, and favours looking to the same side. If you notice this, you should consider seeking professional help from a pediatric osteopath or physiotherapist.

Congenital Muscular Torticollis Anatomy

Torticollis is attributed to a tightening of the sternocleidomastoid. The sternocleidomastoid was given its name because it originated from the clavicle and the sternum and inserts into the mastoid processes of the temporal bone. The primary function is rotating the head to the other side, but it is also responsible for flexing of the neck.



How to Treat Congenital Muscular Torticollis:

1. Manual therapy

Manual therapy is used to traction the neck, reposition the neck, and stretch the muscles on one side of the neck. Not all therapists will perform treatment for this condition due to the complexity of the treatment, so you need to find a therapist who is confident with treatment for this condition. Seek help from a pediatric physiotherapist or pediatric osteopath. Cranial osteopaths often have expertise in this field too.

2. Exercises

The main form of treatment for those who have congenital muscular torticollis is an exercise regime that will stretch the sternocleidomastoid muscle. Stretching exercises involve turning the baby's neck to the one side so that their chin will touch each one of their shoulders. Gently tilt the head to bring the ear of the side that is unaffected down to that of the shoulder. The exercise needs to be completed multiple times throughout the day. A physical therapist can help teach you the proper method to performing these exercises.

Positioning toys where the baby has to turn their head to see them can also help them learn how to stretch the muscles on their own. Carry the child so that they are looking away from the side that is limited. Place the crib in a position that has the child looking away from their limited side to see you on the outside of the crib. Also holding the baby on their side can strengthen and encourage balance of the neck muscles. Again, follow the advice of your therapist.

3. Surgery

If nonsurgical treatment doesn't help the condition, surgery might be required. Roughly, 10 percent of those who have the condition need surgery. Once the child reaches preschool years, the operation is normally scheduled. The procedure lengthens the sternocleidomastoid muscle and is often done on an outpatient surgery.

Tips:

- When the neck muscles that run up and toward the base of the neck are shortened, torticollis is the direct result. Due to the shortened muscles, the head is brought down and to the side.
- The muscle can become injured during or after the birth of the baby. Scar tissue can replace a portion of the muscle, which makes it shorter.
- Some cases of the condition are attributed to a bone problem in the neck part of the spine.
- Even though the condition can occur later on in life, it is often more prevalent in children and infants.
- If you notice that your baby cannot move their head in the same manner as other babies would, it could be torticollis. You may also notice a lump in the neck muscle of your little one.
- Some babies that have torticollis may also be suffering with hip dysplasia.