

Congenital Muscular Torticollis (CMT)

What Parents/Caregivers Should Know

Understanding Congenital Muscular Torticollis (CMT)

What causes CMT?

- There may be different causes for the tightness or weakness of one side of the neck.
- One of the most common causes is a baby being tightly packed in the womb.

How does the tight or weak neck muscle affect my child?

The tight or weak neck muscle can cause a child to:

- Hold their head tilted to one side and look toward the other side.
- Have difficulty turning their head fully in both directions which can make feeding difficult.
- Not like tummy time because their neck muscles are weak making it more difficult to lift their head.
- Use one side of their body more because they tend to always be looking toward that side.
- Develop a flat spot on the back of the head due to resting on their head on one side more than the other side.



CMT is not expected to resolve by itself. Research shows that the earlier physical therapy is started the better the chance that CMT will correct fully and with much less therapy. It is best to start physical therapy before 3 months of age.

The Power of Early Screening and Referral for Physical Therapy

Starting treatment for CMT as early as possible is CRITICAL to:

- Fully correct CMT at an early age when it is easier to stretch the tight neck muscles.
- Check for and treat any other concerns such as:
 - Using one side of the body more than the other
 - Delays in development
 - A flat spot on the head
- Educate parents/caregivers on daily activities to do with their child to correct CMT.

What Can I Do to Help My Child?

- Share concerns with your child's primary care provider and ask for a referral to physical therapy.
- Go to all physical therapy sessions and do all recommended home exercises.
- Provide tummy time when your child is awake.
 - Tummy time strengthens your child's neck, helps develop motor skills, and helps to prevent flat spots on the back of your child's head.
- Limit the use of equipment that restricts movement such as swings and carseats (except when traveling).

How Can Physical Therapy Help My Child?

Your physical therapists will check for the:

- Severity of the CMT
- Use of one side of the body more than the other
- Developmental delays
- A flat spot on the head

Your physical therapist will recommend how often your child should come to physical therapy and teach you how to do exercises at home with your child.

Beginning activities will include:

- Exercises to help stretch and strengthen your child's neck muscles.
- Activities that help your child develop motor skills and use both sides of their body evenly.
- Ways to modify your daily activities such as carrying, handling, and positioning for play and for feeding.
- Tips to make exercises and activities enjoyable for you and your child.

By the end of physical therapy, your child should be able to:

- Hold their head in the middle (instead of turned or tilted).
- Fully turn and tilt their head in both directions.
- Have equal strength in both sides of their neck.
- Use both sides of their body equally during motor skills.



For More Information

- [Benefits of Tummy Time | Safe to Sleep® \(nih.gov\)](#)
- <https://pathways.org/watch/five-essential-tummy-time-moves-how-to-do-tummy-time/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>
- [Physical Therapy Guide to Container Baby Syndrome](#)
- [APTA Pediatrics Cranial Fact Sheet](#)
- [APTA Pediatrics CMT Clinical Practice Guideline | pediatricapta.org/clinical-practice-guidelines](https://pediatricapta.org/clinical-practice-guidelines)
- [Find a PT: https://www.choosept.com/find-a-pt](https://www.choosept.com/find-a-pt)

APTA - Congenital Muscular Torticollis



Contact your local PT:

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