

# Prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome



Taking care of a baby can be a most rewarding and exciting experience. However, it also can be frustrating when the baby gets fussy, especially when an end to the crying seems to be nowhere in sight. Too often, parents or other caregivers lose control and shake, jerk, or jolt a baby in an effort to stop the crying.

Most people know the dangers of hitting an infant or child. But did you know that shaking your baby also is very dangerous? Your pediatrician and the American Academy of Pediatrics want you to be aware of the dangers of shaking a baby. If you ever have felt frustrated when taking care of a fussy baby, read on to find out why shaking a baby can be deadly.

## What is shaken baby syndrome?

Shaken baby syndrome is a serious type of head injury that happens when an infant or toddler is severely or violently shaken. Babies are not able to fully support their heavy heads. As a result, violent and forceful shaking causes a baby's brain to be injured. Too often, this leads to the death of a baby. It also can lead to

- Bleeding around the brain
- Blindness
- Hearing loss
- Speech or learning disabilities
- Chronic seizure disorder
- Brain damage
- Mental retardation
- Cerebral palsy

Shaken baby syndrome usually occurs when a parent or other caregiver shakes a baby out of anger or frustration, often because the baby will not stop crying. Shaken baby syndrome is a serious form of child abuse. Remember, it is *never* okay to shake a baby.

## What are the signs and symptoms of shaken baby syndrome?

When a baby is violently shaken, brain cells are destroyed and the brain cannot get enough oxygen. As a result, a victim of shaken baby syndrome may show one or all of the following signs and symptoms:

- Irritability
- Lethargy (difficulty staying awake)
- Difficulty breathing
- Tremors (shakiness)
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Coma
- Death

## Spread the word!

Parents, if other people help take care of your baby, make sure they know about the dangers of shaken baby syndrome. This includes child care providers, older siblings, grandparents, and neighbors — *anyone* who cares for your baby. Make sure they know it is *never* okay to shake a baby.

## What do I do if my baby is shaken?

If you think your baby might have been injured from violent shaking, the most important step is to get medical care right away. Call your pediatrician or take your baby to the nearest emergency department. If your baby's brain is damaged or bleeding inside from severe shaking, it will only get worse without treatment. Getting medical care right away may save your baby's life and prevent serious health problems from developing.

Be sure to tell your pediatrician or the doctor in the emergency room if your baby was shaken. Do not let embarrassment, guilt, or fear get in the way of your baby's health or life. Without the correct information, your pediatrician or the doctor may assume your baby has an illness. Mild symptoms of shaken baby syndrome are very similar to colic, feeding problems, and fussiness. Your baby may not get the right treatment if the doctor does not have all the facts.

## When babies cry

It is not always easy to figure out why babies cry. They may be hungry or overtired. They may be cold or need their diapers changed. Sometimes it seems like they cry for no reason. The following are a few ideas to try when your baby does not stop crying:

- Check to see if your baby's diaper needs changing.
- Wrap your baby in a warm, soft blanket.
- Feed your baby slowly, stopping to burp often.
- Offer your baby a pacifier.
- Hold your baby against bare skin, like on your chest, or cheek-to-cheek.
- Rock your baby using slow, rhythmic movements.
- Sing to your baby or play soft, soothing music.
- Take your baby for a walk in a stroller.
- Go for a ride with your baby in the car (remember to always use a car seat).

If you have tried all of these and your baby continues to cry, go back and try them again. Most babies get tired after crying for a long time and eventually will fall asleep.

## When your baby cries, take a break – don't shake!

If you have tried to calm your crying baby but nothing seems to work, it is important to stay in control of your temper. Remember, it is never okay to shake, throw, or hit your baby — and it never solves the problem! If you feel like you are getting angry and might lose control, try the following:

- Take a deep breath and count to 10.
- Place your baby in a safe place, leave the room, and let your baby cry alone.
- Call someone close to you for emotional support.
- Call your pediatrician. There may be a medical reason why your baby is crying.

Be patient. Colicky and fussy babies eventually grow out of their crying phase. Keeping your baby safe is the most important thing you can do. Even if you feel frustrated, stay in control and never shake your baby.

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The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



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