

# Please!

## Don't Shake Your Baby



Hôpital de Montréal  
pour enfants  
Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill



Montreal Children's  
Hospital  
McGill University  
Health Centre

**TRAUMATOLOGIE TRAUMA**

# Why Shaking a Baby Is So Dangerous

## What is shaken baby syndrome?

Shaken baby syndrome is a type of abusive head trauma. It is also known as intentional head injury. Shaken baby syndrome is brain damage that occurs when a baby or young child is shaken violently and repetitively and/or is thrown against an object.

## What causes shaken baby syndrome?

Infants and young children have relatively large, heavy heads, weak neck muscles and a brain that is still developing. This makes a baby's brain more vulnerable to injury from being shaken violently.

A parent or caregiver may become frustrated with a baby's constant crying and may respond by shaking the baby. With forceful shaking, a baby's head wobbles rapidly back and forth and the brain vigorously strikes the inside of the skull repeatedly. The brain may bleed or swell, raising pressure, which can further harm brain tissue. The result may be **permanent brain damage**.

**CHILDREN UNDER THE  
AGE OF 1 YEAR ARE AT  
THE MOST RISK**

## **Shaking a baby can have serious consequences such as:**

- Blindness
- Paralysis
- Seizures
- Global delays in development
- Learning disabilities
- Spinal cord injuries
- Death

## **What signs may indicate that your baby has been shaken?**

- Irritability or unusual sleepiness and lethargy
- Limp body
- Poor feeding or vomiting for no apparent reason
- Seizure
- Difficulty breathing
- Eyes roll back
- Loss of consciousness



# The Don'ts

Babies can have fun and benefit from playing but they remain fragile.

DON'T TAKE ANY CHANCES and remember:

- Don't ever shake your baby
- Don't engage in forms of playing with your baby that involve shaking
- Don't toss your baby in the air
- Don't spin your baby around
- Don't swing your baby by the ankles or by the arms

# The Do's

Babies benefit from feeling loved, protected and consoled.

- Do hold and cuddle your baby to show love
- Do support your baby's head while holding, playing or transporting your infant
- Do make sure everyone who handles your baby knows the dangers of shaking
- **Do see a doctor immediately if you suspect your baby has been injured through falling, playing or shaking**

**CALL 911, OR GO TO AN  
EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT  
IMMEDIATELY IF YOU SUSPECT  
THAT YOUR BABY HAS BEEN  
SHAKEN**

# What To Do When Your Baby Cries

Parents or caregivers who shake a baby generally do not mean to hurt them. Sometimes, people get angry or frustrated and they shake their babies to interrupt what seems like endless crying.

Babies often cry as a means of communication. Please be patient and determine your baby's needs.



## Try the following:

- Pick up your baby to offer comfort
- Check your baby's diaper and change it if it's wet or soiled
- See if your baby is too hot or too cold
- Check if your baby is hungry. Feed your baby slowly – and burp him/her often
- Offer your baby a pacifier
- Take your baby to a quiet room
- Hold your baby against your chest and walk or gently rock back and forth
- Take your baby for a ride in the car, for a walk in the stroller, or put the child in a baby swing. Ensure your child is properly secured
- Play soft music
- Read a story
- Count to ten and repeat the above steps

# What To Do If Your Baby Keeps Crying

**Constant crying can wear you out and upset you. Here are some suggestions to help you:**

- Take a time out. Gently place your baby in a crib or another safe place. Leave the room and shut the door
- Call a friend or relative
- Take a shower
- Listen to music
- Close your eyes and take deep breaths

**IF POSSIBLE, ASK SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE OVER COMFORTING YOUR BABY. DON'T BE AFRAID OR ASHAMED TO CALL FOR HELP.**

## **TRAUMA CENTRE**

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