

Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome

Shaken baby syndrome, also called abusive head trauma, is an injury to the brain that happens when a baby or young child is shaken or thrown. Shaking an infant or child, even for just a few seconds, can lead to serious injury and should never be done.

Normal play like swinging a baby gently will not cause injury, but your baby's brain is fragile.

Her spine is just developing. Her head and brain are large and heavy but her neck muscles are weak. They can't support her head easily and can't protect against sudden movement or whiplash. Any forceful shaking can cause the brain to move back and forth inside the skull leading to injury.

Shaken baby syndrome can cause: bleeding, swelling and bruising in the brain, tears in brain tissue, nerves and blood vessels, bleeding in the eyes, blindness, seizures, spinal injuries, and death.

Sometimes you may not be able to tell your baby has been injured because you can't see the damage. It doesn't mean it isn't there. Even minor injuries to the brain over time can cause serious health, behavior and learning problems.

But shaken baby syndrome can be prevented.

The most common cause of shaken baby syndrome is frustration from a parent or caregiver because a baby is crying.

Crying is your baby's way of communicating with you. Babies cry when they are tired, hungry, wet, lonely or uncomfortable. However, some babies will also cry for what seems like no reason at all. When a parent or caregiver can't stop a baby crying it can lead to stress, frustration and anger; you may want to shake the baby to make them stop.

It is never ok to shake a baby. Instead, find other ways to relieve your frustration.

Sing to your baby or rock him. The soft sounds and gentle movements can help calm both you and your baby.

Take a break. Put your baby down in a safe place like his crib or bassinette and walk away for a little while. Count to 10. And breathe. When you have calmed down, check on your baby, he may have calmed down as well or you may be in a better frame of mind to care for him.

Get some rest. You may be tired and not have the patience you need to handle your baby's needs. Get a good night's sleep when you can.

Call someone close to you for help. Family and friends can give you a much needed break if you ask for help.

Don't be afraid to contact your healthcare provider as well. Talk to her about support groups, counseling or medication to help you relieve your stress.

And finally, when someone else is caring for your child, make sure they understand the dangers of shaken baby syndrome as well and talk to them about their coping strategies to relieve stress and frustration.

Remember, your baby will stop crying eventually. Crying usually peaks at 6-8 weeks and starts to reduce by 3-4 months. But if your baby cries a lot and nothing you do seems to help, you may want to talk to your baby's doctor to ensure there are no hidden health reasons for the crying.

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Shaken baby syndrome can cause severe injuries and lasting damage to your baby. It only takes a few seconds. Never shake your baby. Find ways to cope with your own stresses and frustrations to keep your baby safe and healthy.