

Preventing Abusive Head Trauma

Shaking an infant or child, even for just a few seconds, should never be done. Doing so can cause a serious injury to the brain called abusive head trauma.

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

Their spine is still developing. Their head and brain are large and heavy. But your baby's neck muscles are weak. They are not able to support the head easily or protect against sudden movement, such as shaking, hitting, or throwing or jerking an infant or child.

Any forceful impact can cause the brain to move back and forth inside the skull, leading to injury.

Abusive head trauma 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 even 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 is not there. Even minor injuries to the brain over time can cause serious health, behavior, and learning problems.

You can prevent abusive head trauma. The most common cause of it is frustration. When a baby keeps crying, a parent or caregiver may become stressed, frustrated, or angry. They may want to shake, hit, or throw the baby to stop the crying. Never shake, hit, or throw a baby.

Instead, find other ways to ease your frustration. These tips may help: Sing to your baby or rock them. 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 a crib or bassinet. Walk away for a little while. Count to 10. And breathe.

When you have calmed down, check on your baby. They may have calmed down or you may be in a better frame of mind to care for them.

Get some rest. You may be tired and not have the patience 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. Also talk with your healthcare provider. They can help with support groups, counseling, or medicine to relieve your stress.

And finally, when someone else is caring for your child, make sure they know the dangers of abusive head trauma. Ask about their coping strategies to relieve stress and frustration.

Remember, your baby will stop crying eventually. But abusive head trauma, including shaken baby syndrome, can cause lasting damage. It only takes a few seconds.

Never shake your baby. Find ways to cope with stress and frustration to keep your baby safe and healthy.