

# 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 form of abusive head trauma. It is also known as shaken impact syndrome or intentional head injury. Shaken baby syndrome occurs when a baby or toddler is shaken forcefully, repetitively and/or is thrown against an object causing injury to the brain.

## What causes shaken baby syndrome?

Infants and toddlers 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 forcefully.

A parent or caregiver can 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 repeatedly strikes the inside of the skull. The brain may bleed or swell, which may result in **permanent brain damage or death**.

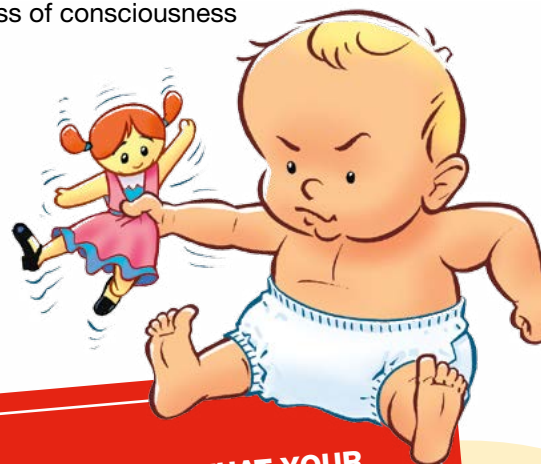
**MOST AT RISK:  
CHILDREN LESS THAN  
1 YEAR OLD.**

**Shaking a baby can result in serious consequences such as:**

- Blindness
- Paralysis
- Seizures
- Developmental problems
- Learning disabilities
- Spine injuries
- Death

**Signs which 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



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

# Why do Babies Cry?



Babies often cry as a means of communication. They may be hungry, cold, tired, bored, in need of a diaper change or in pain.

Some babies cry more than others. Sometimes a baby will continue to cry even after you have tried everything to calm him/her down.

A baby's crying pattern increases in the first month, peaks in the second month and usually decreases by 4 months of age.

Crying is not usually related to health issues. However, if your baby has a fever or diarrhea, is vomiting or has other concerning symptoms, consult a health-care professional.

(R. Barr et al, (2009) Do educational materials change knowledge and behaviour about crying and shaken baby syndrome? A randomized controlled trial, CMAJ, 180(7) 727-733)

## What to do when your baby cries

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

### Try the following:

- Pick up your baby to offer comfort.
- Check your baby's diaper and change it if it is wet or soiled.

- Verify 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 to soothe him/her.
- Take your baby to a quiet room to calm him/her.
- Hold your baby against your chest and walk or gently rock back and forth.
- Some babies calm with motion: Take your baby for a ride in the car or for a walk in the stroller or put the child in a baby swing, always ensuring your child is properly secured.
- Play soft music.
- Read a story.

## What to do if your baby keeps crying

It is not unusual that your baby's persistent crying may frustrate or upset you. This does not make you a bad parent.

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 for assistance.
- Take a shower.
- Listen to music or read.
- Close your eyes and take deep breaths.

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

## DO'S

**Babies benefit from feeling loved, protected and consoled.**

- Do hold and cuddle your baby to show love and make them feel secure.
- 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 an infant or toddler.
- **Do seek immediate medical attention if you suspect your baby has been injured through falling, playing or shaking.**

## DON'TS

**Babies can have fun and benefit from playing, however, they are fragile.**

**DON'T TAKE ANY CHANCES**

- Don't ever shake your baby.
- Don't toss your baby in the air.
- Don't spin your baby around.
- Don't swing your baby by the ankles or arms.

### TRAUMA CENTRE

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