



Health Fact Sheet-Shaken Baby Syndrome

Shaken baby syndrome is a severe form of head injury that occurs when a baby is shaken forcibly enough to cause the baby's brain to rebound (bounce) against his or her skull. This rebounding may cause bruising, swelling, and bleeding (intracerebral hemorrhage) of the brain, which may lead to permanent, severe brain damage or death. The condition is usually the result of non-accidental trauma or child abuse. Symptoms may include changes in behavior, irritability, lethargy, loss of consciousness, pale or bluish skin, vomiting, and convulsions. Although there usually are no outward physical signs of trauma, there may be broken, injured, or dislocated bones and injuries to the neck and spine.

Generally, the prognosis for children with shaken baby syndrome is poor. Most will be left with considerable disability. Retinal damage may cause loss of vision. If the child survives, he or she may require lifelong medical care for brain damage injuries such as mental retardation or cerebral palsy.

NEVER SHAKE A BABY. This action will only severely harm the infant and is never the answer to controlling a crying baby. First, determine why the baby is crying. For example:

- Make sure the baby has dry diaper.
- Make sure the baby is not too hot or cold.
- Check for signs of illness or discomfort, such as diaper rash, teething or tight clothing.
- Try feeding or burping the baby.
- Soothe the baby by lightly rubbing his back.
- Gently rock the baby.
- Offer a pacifier.
- Sing or talk to the baby.
- Take the baby for a walk in a stroller.
- Take the baby for a drive in a car seat.
- After immunizations, be sure the baby is comfortable and given the recommended medications.

If the baby continues to cry and you cannot discover why, try the following:

- Place the baby in his crib and leave the room for a few minutes to remain calm.
- Try to relax by closing your eyes and taking deep breaths.

- Play music, take a shower, read a book.
- Hug a pillow or shake out a rug-it may release tension.
- Call a friend or relative who may be able to care for the baby for a short time while you go for a walk.
- Call Parents Anonymous at 1-800-843-5437.

Additional Resources

National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome

<http://www.dontshake.org/>

Brain Injury Association of NJ

<http://www.bianj.org/>

Prevent Child Abuse NJ

<http://www.preventchildabuseNJ.org/>