

FACTSHEET



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Abusive Head Trauma (AHT)

Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) is a form of non-accidental brain injury. Shaken Baby Syndrome is a type of AHT.

A baby's head is big and heavy compared to the rest of its body. Unless supported, the head flops around because the neck muscles aren't yet strong enough to hold it still. When a baby is shaken their head is thrown back and forth very quickly with great force. This force may cause tiny blood vessels inside the baby's brain to tear and bleed, resulting in one or more of the following:

- blindness or deafness
- seizures
- developmental delays
- learning difficulties
- impaired intellect
- memory and attention problems
- serious other health conditions such as cerebral palsy
- death

They types of injuries caused by shaking a baby don't happen accidentally during normal gentle play.

Throwing your baby into the air or bouncing them onto a soft surface such as a bed, even when done as a form of play, has been known to cause brain injury.

It is important for a baby to experience cuddling, playing and doing all the things a baby really enjoys.



Why would anyone shake a baby?

From clinical experience and the stories families have told health staff, it seems that the major reason babies are shaken is because a parent or carer becomes frustrated or distressed in response to a crying baby.

Many families have stressors in their lives which reduce their capacity to manage the emotional effects of a baby's crying.

It is unclear what degree of force or amount of shaking can cause damage to a baby or child. Therefore, any degree of forceful movement is considered dangerous and should be avoided.

Babies need parents, family members and carers to meet their needs for safety, comfort and nurturing.

So remember, no matter how upset you feel... Shaking your baby is just not the deal!

Why do babies cry?

Crying is normal. Babies can cry for up to two to three hours a day.

Crying is the main way babies can tell us what they need.

Finding out what your baby needs is not always easy.

They may be:

- UNCOMFORTABLE – too hot or too cold?
- HUNGRY – maybe another feed
- UPSET or SCARED – comfort and soft words
- UNWELL – teething, wind or be running a temperature
- LONELY – sometimes your baby will just want to be comforted
- STARTLED – they may just need to be resettled cuddling for a while
- INJURED

How to Cope with a Crying Baby

“Step Back, STOP and THINK!”

If you have made all the obvious checks (hunger, change, thirst) and your baby just won't stop crying, try:

- Another feed – your baby may still be hungry
- Offer your baby a dummy or another safe comfort object or toy
- If you are feeling calm, hold your baby close to your chest so the baby can feel the beat of your heart
- Sing or talk gently to your baby
- Gently rub or massage your baby
- Take your baby for a walk in the fresh air
- Wrap your baby in a small soft sheet so the baby feels secure and try to settle your baby in a safe, dark and quiet place.

If you are finding it difficult to cope or just want some new ideas, try calling a relative or friend, or contact your family doctor, local hospital or your Early Childhood Nurse.

For support and advice, call a parent helpline such as

**Health direct Telephone Help Line (1800 022 222),
Tresillian Telephone Help Line (1800 637 357) or the
Karitane Telephone Help Line (1800 677 961).**



Asking for help is a sign of coping

**Remember, no matter how upset you feel
Shaking your baby is just not the deal!**

Remember:

- Crying babies are not bad.
- A baby's brain is very fragile. Never shake your baby.
- All babies are potential victims.
- ANYONE from ANYWHERE can potentially lose control, and be capable of shaking a baby or child.
- Crying is a 'normal' part of infancy.
- Getting frustrated or distressed about a crying baby is normal. It is the adult's job to be calm.
- There are strategies that may help to soothe a baby.
- Please also see 'The Crying Baby' Factsheet at: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/the-crying-baby or the Shaken Baby Prevention Project website for more support and information: <http://kidshealth.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/shaken-baby>