

SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME

Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma (SBS/AHT) is a term used to describe the constellation of signs and symptoms resulting from violent shaking or shaking and impacting of the head of an infant or small child. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) describes SBS as a subset of AHT with injuries having the potential to result in death or permanent neurologic disability.

Can Tossing My Baby in the Air or Rough Play Cause SBS?

SBS is a form of child abuse that happens when an infant or small child is violently shaken.

Shaken injuries are not caused by:

- Bouncing a baby on your knee.
- Tossing a baby in the air.
- Jogging or bicycling with your baby.
- Falls off a couch or other furniture.
- Sudden stops in a car or driving over bumps.

Although the activities listed above can be dangerous and are not recommended, they will likely not cause SBS injuries.

Why is Shaking a Baby Dangerous?

Violent shaking for just a few seconds has the potential to cause severe injuries. While shaking may cause injury to children of any age, children are most susceptible to being injured during their first year of life. Factors that contribute to a baby's vulnerability include:

- Babies heads are heavy and large in proportion to their body size.
- Babies have weak neck muscles.
- Babies have fragile, undeveloped brains.
- There is a large size and strength difference between the victim and the perpetrator.

Possible Signs and Symptoms of SBS/AHT

- Lethargy / decreased muscle tone
- Extreme irritability
- Decreased appetite, poor feeding or vomiting for no apparent reason
- Grab-type bruises on arms or chest
- No smiling or vocalization
- Poor sucking or swallowing
- Rigidity or posturing
- Difficulty breathing
- Decreased level of consciousness
- Seizures
- Head or forehead appears larger than usual
- Soft spot on head appears to be bulging
- Inability to lift head
- Inability of eyes to focus or track movement
- Unequal size of pupils

Consequences of SBS/AHT

- Learning disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Visual disabilities or blindness
- Hearing impairment
- Speech disabilities
- Cerebral Palsy
- Seizures
- Behavior disorders
- Cognitive impairment
- Death

Information on this page is not intended to replace advice by a health care professional. If you suspect a child has been shaken, seek immediate medical attention.