Treating Torticollis with the Tubular Orthosis

Developed by the health care professionals of Occupational and Physical Therapy with assistance from the Department of Learning and Development.

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Treating Torticollis

Your Occupational or Physical Therapist recommends that your child wear a special collar (Tubular Orthosis) as part of the treatment of congenital muscular torticollis. This is the condition causing the tilt of your child’s head. The collar will remind the child to hold the head straight.

How Does The Collar Work?

Your Physical or Occupational therapist will make the collar from a clear, non-toxic, plastic tubing. The collar has plastic posts on the side of the tilt. These posts touch the child’s head when it falls to the side. They remind him/her to lift the head. Lifting the head strengthens the weak muscle that is causing the tilt.

When Does The Child Wear The Collar?

Since the collar works by reminding your child to lift his or her head, it only works when the child is awake. Remove it for naps and at bedtime. We suggest you take it off when you put your child in the car seat because the child may fall asleep.

Does the child wear the collar for meals or for breastfeeding?

This is up to you and your child. Do what seems best.

Does my child wear the collar when doing the exercises?

Take the collar off while you are doing the range of motion
exercise program. You can keep it on or take it off for tilting and strengthening exercises.

Should my child wear the collar when sick?
We suggest that you keep the collar on for at least part of the day if the child is comfortable. This way s/he stays used to it. There is no need to keep the collar on if the child is very ill, uncomfortable and restless. Put the collar on again once he/she starts feeling better.

How Do I Help My Child Adjust To Wearing The Collar?
Put the collar on for the first time when your child is rested and you have some time to play with your child. Leave it on for at least a half-hour. Your child will probably fuss and need distracting with play. When you feel your child is too upset to play, remove the collar. Try again when the child is rested. Some children will be able to wear the collar for several hours the first time; some will be able to wear it only a half-hour.

Over the first week put the collar on 3 or 4 times each day keeping it on for a little longer each time. Children usually get used to the collar in a week. During the second week most are able to wear it all the time they are awake.

What Is The Best Way To Put On The Collar?
It is easiest to put the collar on while the child is lying on the stomach or when sitting. Wrap the collar around the neck, position the posts and attach the clip.

Where do the posts go?
See diagram which shows the position for right torticollis. The posts are positioned on the side of the tilt, on the side of shortened muscle.

One post goes in front of the shoulder with the upper end just behind the ear.
The other post goes behind the shoulder with the upper end touching the back of the head.

How do I know that the collar fits?
If the collar stays in place without shifting then it is a good fit. At the back clip, you should be able to fit two adult fingers flat between the collar and the child’s neck. We may make the collar quite loose at first. At the second fitting we adjust the collar so it no longer moves out of place.

You may see red areas on the skin of the neck. These should disappear in 20–30 minutes when you take the collar off. If there are red areas after 30 minutes, contact your therapist.
Does my child wear the collar over or under clothing?
Put the collar under all clothing - even undershirts. You can put shirts and loose turtleneck sweaters over the collar.

Can my child choke when wearing the collar?
This has never been a problem. But, be watchful when your child is in the collar as you would with anything around the neck.

Will my child get hot or get a heat rash in the summer?
This may happen. It helps to put the collar into a stockingnette sleeve. Your therapist may have one for you. You can also cut the foot from a child’s thin cotton sock and then slide the collar into the sock.

How Long Will My Child Wear The Collar?
This varies a lot. All children will be wearing the collar at least two months.

The child can begin to wean from the collar when able to hold the head for an hour without tilting. Don’t rush the weaning. It takes several months for the child’s neck muscles to become strong enough to hold the head up while crawling and walking.

Your therapist will help you to work out a plan of how to wean the collar.

Will my child’s development be delayed by wearing the collar?
Wearing the collar will help your child learn to move in a more even pattern. If your child seems very frustrated when learning a new skill like crawling or walking, remove the collar for short periods during play.