## ABUSIVE HEAD TRAUMA (SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME)

### WHAT IS ABUSIVE HEAD TRAUMA (AHT)?

AHT describes the brain injury symptoms that come from severe, violent shaking or trauma to the head of a baby or a young child.

**AHT is NOT caused by:**

- Bouncing baby
- Tossing baby in the air
- Jogging with baby
- Short falls
- Sudden stops in the car

### What Happens:

Babies are light so it can be easy to shake or move them. A baby’s brain is different than an adult’s brain. A baby’s brain is softer and easily moves around if shaken.

- The brain and eyeballs rotate
- Blood vessels tear and brain tissue is hurt
- Pools of blood push on the brain
- Bleeding at the back of the eye

### Who is Most Likely To Cause AHT:

- Fathers (37%)
- Mothers’ Boyfriends (20.5%)
- Female Babysitters (17.3%)
- Mothers (12.6%)
- Others (12.6%)

### Why are babies at risk:

1. Babies have big, heavy heads and small bodies
2. Babies have weak necks
3. Babies have brains that are still growing and can be hurt

### SYMPTOMS

- More irritable and sleepy than normal
- Hard to wake from sleep
- Fast growth of head
- Unable to lift head
- Swollen soft spot on head
- Trouble breathing
- Eyes roll back
- Not focused eyes
- Different pupil size
- Not hungry
- Vomiting without fever/diarrhea
- Not smiling or making sounds
- Poor suck or swallow
- Blue lips or pale skin
- Seizures
- Unknown bruises
- Strange body positions
- Coma or death

Abusive Head Trauma is **under-diagnosed**

### Additional Information:

- Occurs most often before 6 months old
- Babies are at the greatest risk within the 1st year of life
- ~1,300 cases yearly
- a few seconds of shaking or trauma can cause severe injury or death
- cause of severe traumatic brain injury in children under 1
- ~80% of children experience lifelong disabilities
- #1 cause of death from trauma in children under 2
- ~25% of children die
- ~3% of parents anonymously report shaking their babies

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Babies are at the greatest risk within the 1st year of life. Abusive Head Trauma occurs most often before 6 months old and affects ~1,300 cases yearly. AHT is under-diagnosed, affecting #1 cause of severe traumatic brain injury in children under 1, and ~80% of children experience lifelong disabilities. Abusive Head Trauma is a critical issue, affecting ~25% of children who die, and ~3% of parents who anonymously report shaking their babies.
RESOURCES
No one plans to hurt a baby. Be prepared.

Open your smartphone’s camera app and point it at the QR code. The link will appear for you to tap.

https://www.cryingbabyplan.org
Crying Baby Plan

https://dontshake.org
National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome: Resources

http://purplecrying.info
The Period of Purple Crying

https://rb.gy/2loi7
Parent Support Hotline: 1-800-422-4453

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: 1-833-943-5746

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POSSIBLE CAUSES

#1 Intense crying/colic
- Substance use
- Family violence
- Trouble feeding a child
- Untreated mental health disorders

What leads an adult to cause AHT

Being woken up

OUTCOMES
Outcomes depend on the severity of damage

- Visual disability or blindness
- Cognitive disability
- Paralysis
- Learning disability
- Physical disability
- Speech-language or hearing disability
- Cerebral Palsy
- Behavior trouble
- Seizures or Death

PREVENTION
To calm a crying baby...

- Rock baby
- Play calm music
- Go for a walk
- Feed baby
- Go for a car ride
- Change baby’s diaper
- Check for sickness
- Check baby’s temperature

If your baby continues to cry...

- Take deep breaths
- Put the baby in a safe place and walk away. Check on the baby every 5 minutes
- Call a friend, relative, or neighbor for a break
- Call your child’s doctor

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Laws
Legal change is needed to reduce the incidence of AHT

Current laws such as Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) and Refundable Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) can reduce parent stress and AHT rates

Equity Issues
Black, Latino, and Female workers are less likely to have access to paid family medical leave

Covid-19
When parents are stressed there is a greater risk for child abuse

Increased number of death from AHT

Increased severity of AHT injury

Unclear effect on rates of AHT

REFERENCES
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