

Physical Consequences of Shaking an Infant or Toddler

What Happens:

- The brain rotates within the skull cavity, injuring or destroying brain tissue.
- When shaking occurs, blood vessels feeding the brain can be torn, leading to bleeding around the brain.
- Blood pools within the skull, sometimes creating more pressure within the skull and possibly causing additional brain damage.
- Retinal (back of the eye) bleeding is very common

Immediate Consequences:

- Breathing may stop or be compromised
- Extreme irritability
- Seizures
- Limp arms and legs or rigidity/posturing
- Decreased level of consciousness
- Vomiting; poor feeding
- Inability to suck or swallow
- Heart may stop
- Death

Long-Term Consequences:

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

Why:

- Babies' heads are relatively large and heavy, making up about 25% of their total body weight. Their neck muscles are too weak to support such a disproportionately large head.
- Babies' brains are immature and more easily injured by shaking.
- Babies' blood vessels around the brain are more susceptible to tearing than older children or adults.

When:

- Often, perpetrators shake an infant or child out of frustration or anger. This most often occurs when the baby won't stop crying. Other triggering events include toilet training difficulties and feeding problems.