Shaken Baby Syndrome

Shaken baby syndrome (SBS) is a severe form of head injury caused by physical child abuse. It happens when an infant or child (up to age five) is shaken with force by the shoulders, arms or feet. The shaking causes the baby's brain to bounce back and forth against the inside of their skull. The bouncing destroys brain cells and the brain does not get enough oxygen. This leads to bruising, swelling and bleeding (*intracerebral hemorrhage*) of the brain or in the eyes. This can lead to lasting brain damage or death. Although there are usually no physical signs of trauma to the head, there may be broken, injured or out-of-joint bones and injuries to the neck and spine.

CAUSES

Often times, SBS is caused by a parent or caretaker that shakes the baby out of anger, frustration or loss of control because the baby will not stop crying.

SYMPTOMS

- Changes in behavior.
- Hard time staying awake.
- Loss of consciousness.
- The baby is very pale or blue color (*cyanotic*).
- Throwing up.
- Uncontrollable shaking (*convulsions*).
- Hard time nursing or eating.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is made by looking at the baby and seeing the symptoms. Blood tests and X-rays may be performed.

PROGNOSIS

SBS can lead to:

- Mental retardation.
- Loss of movement in the arms, legs or other parts of the body.
- Uncontrollable shaking (*convulsions*).
- Vision impairment and blindness.
- Slowed mental and physical development.
- Muscle spasms.
- Cerebral palsy.
- Death.

TREATMENT

Emergency treatment is needed right away. Treatment usually includes life saving measures such as stopping the brain's internal bleeding and relieving the pressure in the brain.

PREVENTION AND HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Make sure the people that take care of a baby (parents, siblings, grandparents, childcare providers and neighbors) know that shaking a baby in not okay.
- All babies cry. Caregivers often feel overwhelmed by a crying baby. Calling a friend, relative or neighbor for support or help. This lets the caregiver take a break from the situation. If support is not available right away, the caregiver could place the baby in a crib (making sure the baby is safe), close the door, and check on the baby every five minutes. If you have no one to help you, and the baby will not stop crying:
  - Feed the baby, change the diaper and make sure the baby is not too hot or cold. Make sure their clothing is not too tight.
  - Walk, rock, dance or massage the baby gently.
  - Give the baby a pacifier or a toy that makes a noise like a rattle.
  - Take the baby for a walk outside in a stroller or a ride in the car in a car seat.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You think your baby may have SBS.
- The baby will not wake up.
- The baby is very pale or blue color (*cyanotic*).
- Uncontrollable shaking (*convulsions*) happens.
- The baby starts throwing up.
- The baby shows changes in behavior.
- Your baby has bruises on their arms or neck.

Do not be afraid to tell your pediatrician or emergency room caregiver that your baby was shaken. The right information is needed right away to treat your baby fast and properly.

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