Can Bouncing a Baby Cause Shaken Baby Syndrome?

People who care for young children want to know if bouncing a baby on their knee can hurt him. They also wonder about burping a baby or playfully tossing her into the air.

What is Shaken Baby Syndrome?
Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is the damage done to a baby by severe shaking. It can include brain damage, blindness, paralysis, seizures, and even death. Shaking a baby or child is a form of child abuse. Babies have weak neck muscles, very large heads, and soft brains.

Who Shakes Babies and Why?
Mothers, fathers, friends, relatives, baby-sitters, day care providers – someone caring for a child even for just a few hours – have shaken infants and young children. Most cases of SBS occur when a baby will not stop crying and a caregiver gets very frustrated. They may not even know that it is dangerous. Make sure that everyone who cares for your baby or child knows the risks of shaking.

What about Play?
• When in doubt about an activity, don’t do it, or ask your health care provider if it’s ok.
• Always support a baby’s head. It is unsafe not to support the head and neck.
• Gentle bouncing or burping will not cause SBS. However, tossing a child into the air is dangerous. A child’s head can be easily bumped and limbs injured or broken.

Use Common Sense
Consider the age and development of the child. A baby who does not have full neck control needs his neck supported. Therefore, bouncing, or rough jiggling is not a good idea. An older baby who can support her own head may enjoy being bounced gently on someone’s knee. The key to safe play and baby care is to always ensure adequate support for the child’s neck and head. And, of course, always be gentle with babies.

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