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Head Banging

What is head banging?

Head banging is when your child bangs his head against a solid object such as a wall or the side of a crib. It is most common at naptime, bedtime, or when your child wakes up at night. Head banging usually lasts 15 minutes or less, but may go on for over an hour.

What is the cause?

Head banging is usually a way for your child to comfort himself. As many as 2 in 10 healthy children between the ages of 6 months and 4 years of age will bang their head at some time. Boys are more likely to bang their head than girls. Children are more likely to bang their heads when they:

- Are teething or have a painful ear infection
- Are frustrated or angry, as part of a temper tantrum
- Want attention from parents or other adults
- Have cerebral palsy, schizophrenia, autism, blindness, or Down syndrome

How is it treated?

Most children will outgrow the habit by school age. Since the rhythmic movement is comforting, it may help to find other rhythmic activities for your child, such as dancing, marching, clapping to music, beating on toy drums, riding a rocking horse, or playing on a seesaw or a swing. Giving your child a stuffed animal may help. Stay calm and don't make a big deal about head banging, especially if it is part of a temper tantrum.

As long as your child is safe, it is usually best to ignore night-time head banging. Give your child lots of attention during the day and ignore head banging at night. Visiting your child reinforces the behavior.

How do you prevent head injury?

It is very unlikely that children under the age of 3 will seriously injure themselves with this habit. While it looks and sounds bad, toddlers cannot bang hard enough to fracture the skull or cause brain damage. If you want to protect your child, you could put a thick rug or rubber pad on the floor or have your child wear a protective helmet. Extra pillows or bumpers in the crib usually don't work. Make sure the crib or bed is secure. Moving the bed or crib away from the wall may reduce the noise.

Talk with your child's healthcare provider if you are worried about your child or your child:

Disrupts the entire house with his behavior

- Hurts himself or you think he will hurt himself
- Has other symptoms of developmental problems, such as frequently not looking at you or is slow to respond
- Is unable to sleep