A SMT is a non-malignant swelling within the muscle just above the collarbone.

The lump is within the sternocleidomastoid muscle, which joins the base of the skull to the collarbone.

In some babies this muscle is shorter on one side so the baby lies with their head tilted to one side and rotated to the other.

With treatment, the muscle will grow and stretch; but if left untreated the condition may cause a permanent limitation of the baby's neck movement that may need surgery.

As the muscle stretches and grows the lump may look like it is getting bigger. This happens as the lumps softens and breaks up.

There are several theories as to what causes SMT in babies, but one of the main theories is related to breech deliveries or birth traumas.

You may notice your baby also prefers to look in a particular direction, which tends to be the opposite side to the lump. This is known as a preferential head turn or torticollis.

A baby with torticollis or a SMT is at risk of developing positional or deformational plagiocephaly (when one side of the head does not match up with other side).

During most normal births a newborn head may appear pointy or long for a short time after passage through the birth canal. This usually corrects itself within six weeks after birth.

However if your baby prefers to look in one direction, or spends a long time on their back, in a car seat or reclining chair, part of the skull may become flat. Plagiocephaly does not affect the development of a baby's brain.
How to help
All the following advice is aimed to encourage your baby to turn their head towards the side they normally avoid independently.

You may also be referred to see your local physiotherapist for further advice.

• When your baby is in the cot try placing them so they have to turn towards you when you walk in the room

• Remember tummy time is important and should be part of every babies daily routine as it encourages head turning and control

• Ask friends and family to approach your baby from the side they don’t like to turn to

• In the cot or other play positions place toys to the non-preferred side

• When cuddling your baby against your shoulder if he or she doesn’t like looking to the left, place on the right shoulder or if he or she doesn’t like looking to the right, place on the left shoulder as babies tend to look outwards in this position

• Sometimes it can be helpful to turn your baby on to their side and then gradually let their body come onto his or her back leaving the head turned the way you want. This works best if a toy is used to distract your baby.

The FSID (Foundation for the study of infant deaths) created a back to sleep, front to play campaign in 2006, the leaflet can be viewed at [www.sids.org.uk/front-play-campaign.html](http://www.sids.org.uk/front-play-campaign.html)

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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688 for help.