

Brachial Plexus Injury/ Erb's Palsy

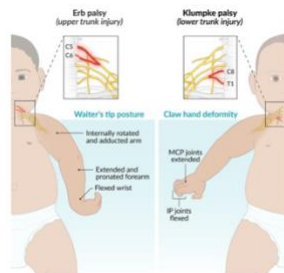
What this means:

Your baby's shoulder and arm are controlled by a group of nerves in the neck called the brachial plexus. During birth, these nerves can be stretched or strained, especially if the delivery was difficult or your baby's shoulders were a little stuck.

When this happens, you may notice your baby:

- Keeps one arm still or floppy
- Holds the arm with the shoulder turned inward and the hand turned outward ("waiter's tip" posture)
- Has good movement in the hand and fingers, but less at the shoulder or elbow

This is called a brachial plexus traction injury. When only the upper nerves are affected (C5–C6), it's often called Erb's palsy.



Erb's Palsy

Reassurance:

With gentle handling, therapy, and time, most babies recover beautifully.

You are an important part of your baby's progress — every cuddle, playtime, and exercise helps the nerves heal and movement return.

What to expect:

- Many babies recover well in the first few weeks or months.
- Some may need extra support from a paediatric osteopath, physiotherapist or occupational therapist.
- Gentle exercises and the way you hold and play with your baby can help prevent stiffness and encourage movement.

How you can help at home:

- Handle your baby gently and support both arms when lifting.
- Avoid laying your baby on the affected arm, including when breastfeeding.
- Keep the affected arm moving during daily care — include it when dressing, bathing, or playing.
- Do gentle range-of-motion exercises as shown by your therapist to prevent tightness in the shoulder or elbow.
- Avoid pulling or forcing movements — slow and comfortable is best.
- Encourage tummy time (when baby is awake and supervised) to help develop shoulder and neck strength.

Follow-up and recovery:

- Your baby will be reviewed by your paediatrician and therapy team.
- If the arm is still very weak by around 3 months, further tests or a referral to a specialist may be needed.
- Most babies with mild injuries regain movement over time, though some may have slight weakness or limited range later on.

When to seek extra help:

Contact your healthcare team if you notice:

- No improvement or movement in the affected arm by 6–8 weeks
- Stiffness or joints that don't move easily
- Pain, swelling, or unusual postures developing

For more information:

- Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne: Brachial Plexus Palsy:
rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Brachial_plexus_palsy
- The Brachial Plexus Clinic (Melbourne): rch.org.au/brachialplexus

Disclaimer:

This information sheet is for general educational purposes only. It does not replace individual health care or medical advice. If you have concerns about your baby's development, feeding, or comfort, please speak to a qualified healthcare provider

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