



Head banging, body rocking and head rolling

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What is head banging, body rocking and head rolling?

These kinds of repetitive movements are common in young children. They may be alarming to see as some children move quite forcefully, but they are a **normal part of development**. They occur in many children from around 9 months through to up to 3 or 4 years old.

Many children use repetitive movements, such as head banging, body rocking, and head rolling as a way to self soothe. It may be they knock their head against the wall or bars of their cot, or they may rock their whole body back and forth. Some will rock or roll just their arms or legs.

These movements are common at bedtime to settle to sleep, but may also occur during the night and when sleepy during the daytime.

Most children will grow out of it by 4 years, but some with developmental delay will take longer. If you are concerned that your child is still using these repetitive movements, speak to your GP or health visitor.

What can I do?

While head banging, body rocking and head rolling are not necessarily anything to worry about for typically developing children, there are a few things you can try that will generally be good for your child's sleep as they grow.

- A calm bedtime routine with lots of touch - hair stroking, massage etc. - can give your child the sensory input that the repetitive movement provides, so they feel calm and ready for sleep.
- Giving the child another object to self soothe with, such as a soft blanket or a parent's t-shirt, can also help them find other soothing sensations.

Will it hurt my child?

Children who head bang, body rock, or head roll, are **unlikely to hurt or injure themselves**, beyond a small bruise. It won't affect their development or cause any damage to the brain. However, it can appear quite violent, so it is natural as a parent to be cautious. There are a few safety precautions that can make you feel more secure.

- Check your child's cot or bed for stability. Some children can be very vigorous with these movements, and a quick look at the joints can reassure you that the bed won't collapse.
- Moving the cot or bed away from a wall can help if your child makes it move enough to bang and keep the rest of the household awake, or if you are worried about disturbing neighbours.
- If sleeping in a different place for daytime naps, make sure your child is napping on a solid base. E.g if asleep in a car seat you then bring inside so as to not wake them, don't put it on a table in case they rock themselves off.
- For toddlers and older, adding padding around the bed can bring some reassurance. However, cot bumpers and other types of padding are not recommended for babies for safety reasons. If you are unsure, speak with your health visitor who can advise.

