

Container Baby Syndrome

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Whether parents buy them or receive them as gifts, nearly every house has a variety of baby swings, infant sitting chairs, bouncy chairs, jumpers, exersaucers, baby walkers and other brightly colored equipment touted by marketing ploys as being healthy for children. However, these devices can be hindering and even detrimental to development.

Developmental delays that come as a result of these devices, or even overuse of necessary devices such as a car seat or highchair, have been coined Container Baby Syndrome. Some common symptoms of container babies include:

- Delayed development of common skills like maintaining head control, rolling, crawling, and walking.
- Decreased tolerance for tummy time.
- Head and facial deformities, and torticollis
- Decreased muscle control in the neck, trunk, arms and legs.
- Increased difficulty with transitioning from one position to another.
- Impaired language and cognitive development.
- Impaired sensory processing.

Creating a container baby scenario is not hard to imagine. Let's consider an imaginary scenario of a typical day. You place your baby in his car seat to go to the store. While on the way, he falls asleep. You

are so relieved he is sleeping, you keep him in his car seat. When you get done shopping, you have a couple more errands to run. It wouldn't make sense to take him out of the car seat just to put him back in, so you leave him in it.

When you get home your baby is hungry, so you immediately put him in his bouncy chair and strap him in so that he won't fall out while you get his bottle ready. He downs his bottle while you check your email. Now he is tired, but you have to get your other kids from school soon.



You can't afford for him to not sleep, so you put him in his swing to fall asleep which always works like a charm. While he sleeps, you hurry to clean dishes and do laundry in the precious time you have. When it is time, he goes back into the car seat to pick up the kids.

After waiting in long lines at the school, it is back home to work on homework and make dinner. Hoping to keep your baby entertained, you prop him up with a blanket in his exersaucer because he enjoys being upright even if he really does not yet have the control to be in there by himself.

He is done with the jumping and dinner is only half prepared, so you put him in his infant sitting chair with a toy to keep him entertained near you. During dinner you strap him into his bouncy chair so he can at least be near the family while you all eat. As you feed him before putting him to bed, you notice his flat spot is getting a little worse and worry what you should do about it. (continued on page 2)

Container Baby Syndrome (continued)

In the scenario described on the previous page, which is likely commonplace in many homes with multiple children and multiple containers, the infant was never given the opportunity to develop appropriate motor skills because he was held or propped in place for the majority of the day.

So much of development as an infant happens through movement. As newborns lie on their stomachs, watch their hand move, and realize they can



control it they are developing hand-eye coordination. As they lift their head to get a better look at a toy, they realize they can see so much more and want to interact and explore. This develops their cognitive skills to explore and learn cause and effect.

As they learn to grab things and bring them to their mouth, they develop self-feeding skills. Reaching for a toy just out of reach leads to belly crawling and rolling, which, in turn, leads to crawling on hands and knees and moving in and out of sitting. This leads to pulling to standing and then walking.

Development happens when children are given the opportunity to move by themselves. When we limit their opportunities to move, we hinder their ability to develop. Container use is super common because it is so convenient and sometimes unavoidable. Putting a child in a bouncy chair is better than not knowing what will happen while you are taking a much-needed shower, and sometimes a sleep-deprived child will sleep better in a baby swing than in her crib. However, let's make our use of containers the exception rather than the rule. Wear your baby in a baby carrier while you walk through the grocery store. Find a playpen large enough to allow them to move and explore while still keeping safe from electrical cords and falling down stairs.

Don't be afraid to let your baby be uncomfortable for a few minutes in tummy time while they are building muscles and skills that will contribute to future movement. Take time to be present with them in their struggles, to make it more comfortable for them. Be creative with ways you embrace movement, exploration, and increased interaction and be mindful of how you use the container devices in your homes.