

Pavlik harness

Developmental dysplasia of the hip

Developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) is a condition where a baby's hip joint develops irregularly. In a child with DDH, the socket (acetabulum) is shallow, the ligaments around the hip joint are loose and the ball (femoral head) may become unstable. In some babies, these factors can result in partial dislocation (subluxation) or full dislocation of the hip.

What causes DDH is unknown, but it is more common in first-borns, girls, breech births, and those with a family history.

Treatment varies depending on the severity and may include a brace (also known as an orthosis), hip spica (plaster), or surgery – sometimes in combination.

This information focuses on treatment using a Pavlik harness. You can discuss other treatment options with your orthopaedic doctor.



What is a Pavlik harness?

A Pavlik harness is an orthosis (brace) that your baby needs to wear to treat developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH).

How to fit your baby's Pavlik harness

[Watch the video](#) for step-by-step instructions on how to fit the Pavlik harness on your baby or scan the QR code.



Nappy changes

Keep the Pavlik harness on while changing your baby's nappy. Make sure you feed the tabs of the nappy through the straps at the back of the legs, so the nappy is directly on your baby and no brace straps are caught in the nappy.

Clothes

Clothes must be worn outside of the Pavlik harness. This maximises the amount of time your baby is in the brace as you will not need to remove the brace and clothes to change their nappy. It's okay to leave a singlet underneath the brace if you only change the singlet once a day at bath time (if you've been instructed to remove the brace for bathing).

Anything with legs and other clothing items must go outside of the brace. You may need to use bigger clothing sizes, especially items being worn over the brace to prevent the knees



being pulled in together. Avoid tight leggings or pants over the brace as this will pull your baby's knees together.

Sleeping

Sleep suits, sleeping bags or sleeping sacks may be worn with the brace, but you may need to use bigger sizes to avoid your baby's knees being pulled in towards each other.

Holding, positioning, feeding and swaddling

Make sure your baby's knees are always kept out to the sides to ensure the hips stay in the correct position. Do not push the knees inwards against the brace. If your baby's knees push inwards, you may need to reposition your baby while holding and feeding them.

When swaddling, make sure the blanket is wrapped loosely over your baby's knees, so it doesn't pull the knees inwards.

Prams and car seats

If your baby has trouble fitting comfortably in a pram or car seat due to the brace, let your orthotist know. A consultation with an occupational therapist (OT) at Perth Children's Hospital can be arranged to help modify your current pram or car seat, or find a more suitable option.

Bathing

You may remove the Pavlik harness to bath your baby only if you have been instructed to do so. If your baby is required to wear the brace 24 hours per day, you will need to sponge bath them around the brace.

Cleaning the brace

Spot clean the brace as required for daily stains. If necessary, you can clean the brace with cold, mild soapy water. Ensure the brace is completely dry afterwards to avoid irritating the skin. Please do not put your baby's brace in the washing machine or dryer; this will cause the velcro to weaken and no longer stick.

Tummy time

Continue to encourage and monitor tummy time while your baby is wearing the brace. Most babies will tolerate tummy time in the brace. If you are worried, prop a thin pillow or rolled up towel underneath your baby's chest to help with positioning.

Getting used to the Pavlik harness

It will take you and your baby a little while to adjust to the Pavlik harness. It's important to note the brace is not causing your baby any pain, it's just frustrating as they can't kick their legs freely. It may be helpful to get into a routine of removing the brace at the same time each day to encourage your baby to adjust to it, unless full time (24 hour) wear has been instructed.



Follow up appointments

Your baby's Pavlik harness needs to be reviewed and adjusted about every 3 weeks to accommodate their growth. This will be done by an orthotist in the Orthotics Department.

A doctor in the Orthopaedic Department will regularly review your child's hips throughout the length of treatment.

Top tips

- The Pavlik harness is not causing your baby pain. Your baby may be unsettled until they are used to wearing the brace; this is normal.
- Please persist with the Pavlik harness treatment and contact the Orthotics Department if you are concerned.
- **Do not adjust the brace yourself.** Should you feel it requires an adjustment or review please contact the Orthotics Department.

Your baby's wear time is _____

Learn more

For more information and FAQs about DDH and Pavlik harnesses visit the PCH website at: pch.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Orthotics

Contacting the Orthotics Department

Phone: (08) 6456 0411

Email: PCHOutpatients.Orthotics@health.wa.gov.au

If you are emailing, please provide your child's full name, date of birth and attach photos to help explain your concern. An orthotist will get back to you within one business day.



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