

Developmental hip dysplasia

If your baby has developmental dysplasia of the hip, or DDH, it means their hips are unstable. This can be because the socket of their hip joint (called the acetabulum) is not deep enough, or the ball part of their thigh bone (the femoral head) is in the wrong position in the socket. The problem is usually there at birth, but it can also develop during infancy or childhood.

Causes of DDH

The exact cause is not known, but some things can make children more likely to develop DDH. These include:

- family history
- the baby's position at birth, for example breech
- other womb factors such as foot abnormalities and low levels of fluid.

Girls are affected six times more often than boys.

It is important to diagnose and treat DDH as early as possible. If it isn't treated, it can lead to painful hips, limping and reduced strength. Your child could also develop arthritis early in life.

Diagnosing DDH

Your midwife, doctor and Plunket nurse will examine your baby for hip problems at birth and several times during their first months of life. If a doctor suspects your baby has a hip problem, your baby will have an ultrasound scan of their hips. If your baby is 6 months or older, they will have an X-ray.

Babies with a higher risk of DDH (due to family history, breech birth or other womb factors) will usually be offered an ultrasound scan at about 6 to 8 weeks of age.

Preventing DDH

How your baby's legs are positioned during the first few months of their life may affect their risk of developing DDH. It is important to consider hip-healthy equipment, clothing and leg positions. See the prevention links on the International Hip Dysplasia Institute website for more information (www.hipdysplasia.org/developmental-dysplasia-of-the-hip).

Treating DDH

If your baby has DDH, a paediatric orthopaedic surgeon will assess their hips and look at the ultrasound scan or X-ray. The surgeon will decide how best to treat the DDH. This will depend on your baby's age and the severity of the condition.

Some babies may need to be treated using a harness. See the HealthInfo factsheet *Treating DDH using a harness*, www.healthinfo.org.nz/patientinfo/242730.pdf.

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