



South-East
Regional Health Authority
Régie régionale de la santé
Sud-Est

Women's & Children's Health Program

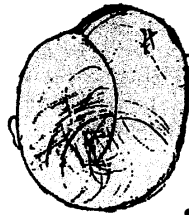


Positional Plagiocephaly

What is Positional Plagiocephaly?

Positional Plagiocephaly (plagee-o-se-fa-lee) is a medical term used to describe the shape of a head that has become misshapen for different reasons.

Head shape looking down from above a baby's head



- skull flat on one side
- one ear may be more forward than the other
- the forehead may appear larger on one side

Causes of Positional Plagiocephaly

There are several causes of Plagiocephaly:

Back Positioning

- Back sleeping is recommended to

reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

- Use of swings, car seats and bouncy chairs also require back positioning.
- Increased time on baby's back for long periods of time may cause flattening of the baby's head.

Premature Birth

- Premies do not move as much on their own.
- Premies heads are softer and more pliable.
- Premies, therefore, are at greater risk for flattening of the baby's head.

Torticollis

- A tightening of the neck muscles.
- May result in the baby keeping his/her head in one position.

How do I position my baby to prevent a flat head?

Here are some things you can do to prevent a flat area on the back of your baby's head:

1. Place the baby at alternate ends of the crib (at the head of crib one day, the foot of the crib the next) so the baby will not be resting his/her head on the same side every day.
2. **Tummy time, tummy time, tummy time.** This is very important for all babies. As soon as the umbilical cord has fallen off, babies should be placed on their tummy several times a day, when **awake and supervised.** At first you baby may fuss but with continued attempts and your attention, he/she will adjust.
3. If you notice that your baby always turns or tilts his/her head to one side, consult your doctor. Your baby may need a physiotherapy referral for stretching exercises.

What can I do if my baby already has a flat head?

1. Position your baby off the flat area

Playing

It is very important when your baby is awake that he/she has some tummy time. Many babies do not like it at first, but you can encourage it by playing with him/her.

Roll up a towel and place it under his/her chest/arms. This will lift his/her head a little so he can see better.

If your baby is really upset, try for short periods, several times every day.



Carrying or holding

Dramatically reduce the amount of time your baby spends on his/her back. This means reducing the time spent in car seat, swings or bouncy chairs.



Try a front carrier when out and about, time spent in a front carrier at the supermarket is one less hour that baby spends on his/her back.



Sleeping

Place a rolled towel or receiving blanket behind the shoulder on the flat side.

2. Talk to a health care professional

After 6 weeks of age, if you are worried about your baby's head shape, see your doctor or public health nurse. Babies who have severe positional plagiocephaly may need to see a pediatrician, physiotherapist or other health care professional.

Reference

Dube K. & Flake, M., Occipital Flattening of Positional Origin, Canadian Nurse, January 2003, Vol 99 (1) P. 16-21.