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Dealing With Plagiocephaly—Flat Heads in Infants

Plagiocephaly is a big word for a child's flat or misshaped head. Parents are usually the first to notice that their baby's head may look flat. Doctors can diagnose plagiocephaly (flat head) during a routine physical exam. A flat head is common.

Positioning usually causes a flat head. Examples include:

1. A baby who drops into the mother's pelvis early before birth,
2. A baby who is a twin, triplet or part of a multiple birth,
3. A premature baby who spends extra time in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (Head bones become stronger and harder in the last 10 weeks of pregnancy.),
4. A baby with torticollis who has very tight neck muscles,
5. A baby who back-sleeps often for long periods in a car seat or infant carrier.

The American Academy of Pediatrics tells parents to put their babies to sleep on their backs to help prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). ***This is very important***. Since parents have been putting their babies to sleep on their backs, the number of babies who die of SIDS has decreased greatly.

Flat head ***does not*** affect a baby's brain growth. It does not cause brain damage or developmental delays. As the baby grows, his neck muscles will get stronger. He will start to roll over. This will allow his head to move into different positions and take the pressure off the flat part of the head. *Most of the time, flat heads are corrected by the time a child is 1 year old.*

If you notice a "flattening" of your baby's head:

- Take your baby to her doctor for a correct diagnosis. Not all flattening is caused by position. Your doctor will know what to do.
- Make sure your baby gets plenty of "tummy time." (See the tummy time tip sheet at www.parenthelpline.org – Infants Section.)
- Change the position of the baby's crib often. Sometimes babies keep their head turned to one side because they are looking at a toy, window, or bright picture. If you move the crib, your baby will turn her head to the other side.
- Limit the time your baby spends in a car seat or baby carrier. Use a sling or front pack to carry your baby.

If the flattening is severe, the doctor may recommend the use of a special helmet. Only a doctor should prescribe a remodeling band or helmet. The baby must see the doctor often so changes can be made. The helmet might be worn for 3 – 6 months as the baby's head is molded into a more normal shape.

Your baby's doctor is the *best person* to give you advice on how to correct a flattening of your baby's head.

For more information log onto: www.aap.org or www.kidshealth.org

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.
544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. , 7 days a week.

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