

Child health information factsheet

Plagiocephaly

Plagiocephaly is a term used to describe the asymmetrical shape of a baby's skull (when one side of the head does not match up with other side). It develops as a result of constant pressure being placed on one area of the thin, flexible skull of the baby.

Until about one year of age the bones of a baby's head are very thin and flexible, which makes it soft and easy to mould.

Positional or deformational plagiocephaly can occur in babies during or after birth.

During most births, the newborn head may appear elongated for a short period of time after passage through the birth canal.

This usually corrects itself within six weeks after birth. If your baby prefers to look in one direction, or spends long periods of time on their back, in a car seat or reclining chair, part of the skull may become flat.

Premature babies are more likely to develop flat heads, as their skulls are softer than full term babies. They also tend to spend more time on their backs without being moved or picked up.



It is important to remember that plagiocephaly does not affect the development of a baby's brain.

How to help

All the following advice is aimed to encourage your baby to spend time in different positions to help their head shape develop. Your child may be referred to a physiotherapist for advice.

Sometimes due to the shape of your baby's head they may have difficulty turning their head in both directions, try some of the following to encourage head turning.

- Tummy time is very important and should be part of every baby's daily routine as it encourages head turning and control



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- Supported sitting (on advice from your physiotherapist). This encourages head turning in both directions taking away the restriction of the altered head shape
- Talk time – try sitting with your knees bent up and place your baby on your lap facing you with their head placed in the crease between your legs, this will help them to turn in both directions taking away the restriction of the altered head shape
- It is important to change the resting position of your baby's head when they are sleeping by swapping between left and right.

The use of helmets to help with the shape of the head is a controversial subject, and not recommended by paediatricians as the head shape will self correct with growth.

The FSID (Foundation for the study of infant deaths) created a back to sleep, front to play campaign in 2006, the leaflet can viewed at www.sids.org.uk/front-play-campaign.html

If you have any questions or concerns please contact

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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688 for help.