

Preventing Flat Head Syndrome

Preventing Plagiocephaly and Brachycephaly



Flat Head Syndrome

Since the Back to Sleep campaign in 1999, Health Canada recommends that babies be put to sleep on their backs to prevent the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

With this change, there has been a reduction in infant mortality.

Also with this change, there has been an increase in incidences where babies are developing flat heads.

HOW WE ARE HELPING:

The Physiotherapy team at George Jeffrey Children's Centre is dedicated to preventing flat head syndrome (plagiocephaly and brachycephaly) by increasing awareness and promoting early intervention for babies who develop a flat head.

What Causes Flat Head?

A baby's skull is soft and therefore can change shape easily.

Babies spend a lot of time on their backs and this constant pressure on their skulls may cause flattening in one spot.

Babies who spend a lot of time reclined in equipment such as car seats, strollers, bouncy chairs, swings; are more likely to develop a flat head.

POSITIONAL PLAGIOCEPHALY:

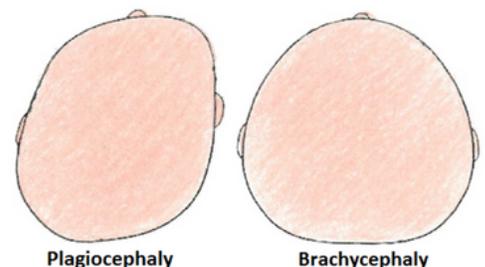
Flattening towards one side of the back of the baby's head.

BRACHYCEPHALY:

Flattening across the back (middle) of the baby's head.

TORTICOLLIS:

Tightness in the neck muscles that cause a baby to hold his/her head tilted to one side and to look mainly in one direction. Keeping his/her head turned to one side often leads to positional plagiocephaly.



How to Prevent Flat Head

Encourage your baby to look equally towards both sides by doing the following:

- Alternate the end of the bassinet or crib in which you place your baby to sleep. Also, alternate the end of the change table.
- Alternate the hip or arm with which you carry your baby.
- For bottle fed babies, alternate the side in which you hold your baby.



Provide supervised tummy time daily while your baby is awake. Start with a minute or two and gradually increase. By the time your child is 3 months of age, he/she should spend at least 1 hour in tummy time spread throughout the day.

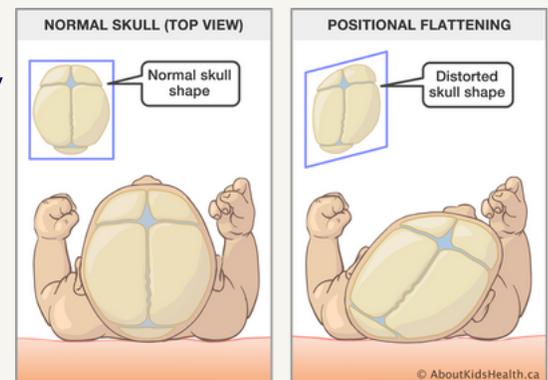
Minimize time spent in equipment where your baby has pressure at the back of his/her head. Consider using an infant carrier as an alternative.

Change your baby's position often.

If your baby prefers to look to one side, gently reposition his/her head to look to the other side regularly. Place toys on the side of the stroller, swing, etc. to encourage your baby to look towards the least preferred side.

Quick Home Assessment

- Look at your baby's head from the back. Do you notice any flattening?
- Look at your baby's head from above. Note any flattening as well as the positioning of the ears and forehead. Does one side look more forward than the other?
- Look at your baby from the front. Is the forehead bigger on one side? Does one cheek appear larger?
- Look at pictures of your baby. Is your baby always holding his/her head tilted or turned towards the same side?



When to Seek Treatment?

- If your child has developed flattening of his/her head.
- If you notice any asymmetry as indicated above in the "Quick Home Assessment" section.
- If your child has a strong preference to look in one direction only and/or tilts his/her head to one side.

Remember:

Prevention and early intervention is key to a successful outcome.

It is important to continue to place babies on their back to sleep to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Document Details:

Document developed May 2020 by Jillian Courtis, Physiotherapist and H el ene Mercier, Physiotherapist.

Document References:

- Permission to use images from aboutkidshealth.ca
- Health Canada: <https://www.canada.ca>
- The Hospital for Sick Children. You Can Prevent Baby Flathead, Toronto, 2003

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