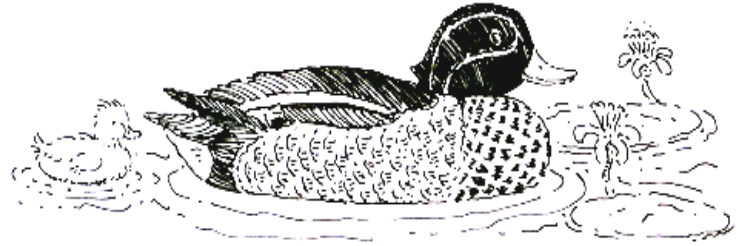


# Head Flattening

In recent years, there has been an increase in babies who develop a flat spot on the back or side of their heads. Head flattening has a formal name. It is positional plagiocephaly (play-gee-oh-sef-uh-lee). It can occur on the side of your baby's head, but most often occurs at the back of the head. It is caused by pressure being placed on that area. Most often, this pressure is due to the position of the child lying down. Since 1992 doctors and other health care providers have urged parents to put infants to sleep on their backs. This was done to reduce infant deaths caused by SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), also called "crib death." Placing babies on their backs to sleep has *greatly* lowered infant deaths. But, it has caused head flattening and or lack of strength in arm and neck muscles in some infants.

A flat or misshapen head does not cause brain damage. Try these tips to prevent head flattening:

- Hold your baby often.
- Limit time in car seats to travel time only.
- Limit time in carriers and swings. Make sure your baby spends plenty of awake time on his or her tummy. This helps keep the head round and strengthens muscles in the arms, shoulders and neck.



- When you feed your baby switch your baby from left to right arms so your infant's head is not always cradled in the same position.
- When putting your baby to sleep – always on his or her back – put the baby's head toward one end of the crib and the next time place your baby's head at the other end.
- Ask friends, family and caregivers to say if they notice your baby's head shape is changing.
- Actively placing your baby in positions other than on his or her back will help the head round out.

Tell people who take care of your baby about these tips. If you have concerns, talk to your baby's doctor or health care provider. This problem is much easier to correct, if needed, in the first year of life.

Continued on back

# Head Flattening

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## **Sometimes Doctors Will Suggest:**

Helmet therapy for severe cases – a mold is taken of baby’s head. Then a helmet that helps reshape the head is made just for them. It is worn 23 hours a day for several months often starting at about 6 months old. (*Note: If a baby’s head remains misshapen it may be hard to get a satisfactory fit with sports helmets later on.*)

Physical therapy – about two thirds of the babies with head flattening also have torticollis (tort-ih-**call**-iss). Torticollis happens in utero in about one in 300 babies. It often results in infants tending to turn the head in one direction only, which can lead to a flat spot on the side of the head. There are exercises that can help.

### **For More Information**

- Your health care provider
- **Children’s Resource Line:**  
**(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500**  
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children’s Hospital. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s health care provider.

**Children’s**

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