

Section 6:

Back To Sleep, Head So Steep!

The Flat Head: Positional Plagio-what?

Plagiocephaly is quite common these days. With the recommendation to place our infants on their backs for sleep to help decrease SIDS (crib death), our infants have various shaped heads. Many things play a role in this, really. Genetic, cultural, social, and environmental effects have helped shape our children today. Certain families and ethnic backgrounds have a higher rate of flat heads. Some cultural and societal norms involve keeping their infants as straight and flat as possible until their spine and back are “strong enough” to support them. Also, with today’s grand choice of infant accessories, the busy parent can attend to their routine while their child sits in a bouncy or rocks in the swing. Prolonged time spent in these can contribute to a flat head.

The most important role is prevention, and this should start early on. Control those aspects of the environment that you can safely. Between 1-2 months of age, if your infant is showing a tendency toward head flattening, talk to your doctor about head and neck stretching exercises. Make sure that while your infant is awake, you are allowing plenty of time away from head rests. Belly time, although unpopular at first, is a good way to strengthen neck muscles and avoid lying flat on the head. If she fusses during belly time, give her a few minutes and she may surprise you. If she prefers to turn her head one way, turn her the opposite way in her crib or play area to entice her with various objects she can gaze at. If she finds it challenging to turn her head to the other side regardless of what you try, talk to your doctor. She may have a tight muscle on the one side of the neck causing torticollis.

If your child’s head has not started to round out by 7-8 months of age, visit your pediatrician for further guidance. She may refer you to a specialist or monitor her closely.