

# DOES YOUR BABY HAVE A FLAT HEAD?

Plagiocephaly is a flat spot on the back or side of a baby's head. It occurs when there is extended pressure on the skull before or after birth. The average age that a flat spot is noticed by parents is 6-8 weeks old. Babies born early are more likely to develop a flat spot because the bones that form the skull are softer than the bones of babies who are born full-term.

The earlier intervention is started, the more positive the outcomes. Conservative treatment is most effective if completed by 6 months of age. A physical therapist can help by educating on proper positioning during feeding, playing, and sleeping and play techniques to promote symmetrical head development.

## POSITIONING CHANGES

Changing the way your baby is positioned frequently during the day is the best way to prevent and improve flat spots on your baby's head. In general, limit the amount of time your baby spends on his or her back when awake.

- Leave your car carrier in the car. Instead, choose a front pack, wrap, or simply carry your baby when possible.
- Alternate the end of the crib/changing table that you place your baby's head.
- When your baby sleeps, turn their head opposite the side of the flat spot IF you can do it without waking them up.
- When interacting with your baby, position yourself and toys off to the side to encourage your baby to turn from side to side and in the opposite direction as the flat spot.
- Alternate which side (hip and/or arm) you carry your baby on. If you are bottle feeding, make sure you alternate the way you hold your baby during feeding.
- Provide LOTS of supervised tummy time. Start with a few minutes multiple times throughout the day. Not all babies enjoy tummy time at first, but it will get easier and soon they will learn to love it! Try other ways to do tummy time, such as holding your baby over your legs, over a pillow, or on your chest.

## TORTICOLLIS

Torticollis is a frequent cause of flattening of the head. 90% of babies with a flat spot have torticollis.

Torticollis occurs when a muscle on one side of the neck is tight, causing tilting of the head to one shoulder and turning of the head to the opposite shoulder. You might notice that your baby prefers to only look to one side. If your baby only turns his or her head to one side, then he or she is more likely to develop a flat spot. Often this can be identified within the FIRST 2 DAYS of birth. Early intervention is key! A physical therapist can work with you and your baby to decrease tightness in the neck, increase neck strength, assist with positioning, and to design a home exercise program.

*If intervention is started before one month of age, 98% of babies achieve near normal neck movement within 1½ months.*



**MOSAIC**  
HEALTH & REHAB

*How much time does your baby spend on his or her tummy per day? To compare, 81 minutes of tummy time per day has been shown to promote development of age appropriate and advanced*