

Positional Plagiocephaly (Flat Head)

General Information

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that you always place your baby on his or her back to sleep to help prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

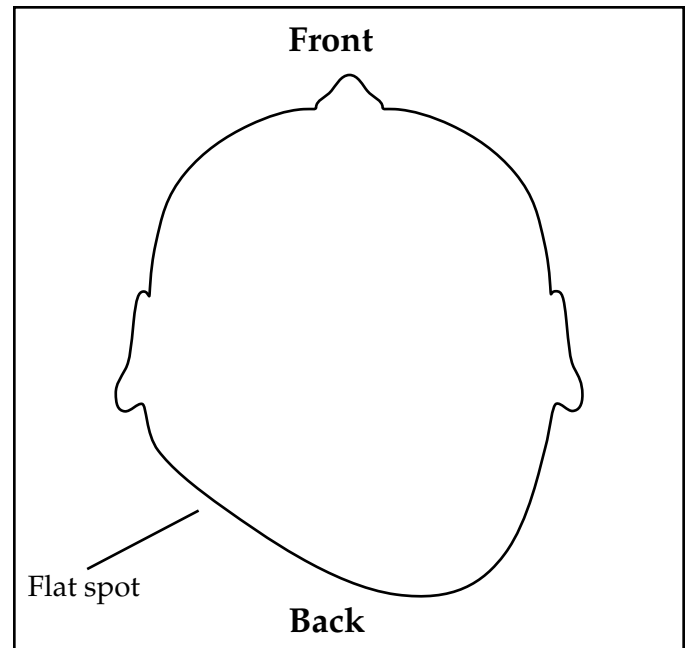
When your baby sleeps on his or her back, you may notice that his or her head becomes a bit flatter in back.

Positional plagiocephaly (flat head) happens when a spot on the back or side of your baby's head becomes flattened. This happens because the bones of your baby's skull are soft and can cause a flat spot when he is placed in the same position for long periods of time.

A flat spot can develop as early as 6 weeks of age or any time after. The sooner you can start changing your baby's position, the less likely a flat spot will develop. Once your baby learns to sit up, the risk of him or her developing a flat spot decreases.

Positional plagiocephaly can also be caused by torticollis. This is when a muscle in the neck tightens, causing your baby to look to one side more than the other. Your baby's health care provider may recommend some activities to help stretch and strengthen this muscle.

The following guidelines may help reduce the chance a flat spot will develop on your baby's head.



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Tummy Time

Tummy time can help prevent flat spots and strengthen your baby's head and neck muscles. You can start giving your baby lots of opportunities for tummy time the day you bring your baby home from the hospital, or as soon as you are able to.

Place your baby on his or her stomach when he or she is awake and someone is watching. A good time to give your baby some tummy time may be after each diaper change or after waking up from a nap.

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If your baby has trouble lifting his or her head when first starting tummy time, you can:

- use a small pillow (such as a Boppy®) or a rolled-up towel under your baby's chest
- lay your baby over your knee when you are sitting with your legs stretched out.

Do not put your baby on a small pillow or other prop when he or she is sleeping.

While your baby is having tummy time, you can:

- Place a mirror in front of your baby. He or she may enjoy looking at his or her reflection.
- Play with your baby. Lie down in front of your baby and talk or sing to him or her.
- Place toys just out of reach of your baby, so he or she will spend time reaching for them or looking at them.

If your baby is having a hard time with tummy time, try putting him or her on his or her tummy a couple times a day for short periods of time (even if it is only for a couple of minutes). If your baby gets too frustrated, turn him or her back on to his or her back. Alternate as needed. You can also try lying down and laying your baby on your chest and cuddling.

Tell your child's care providers to give your baby tummy time while he or she is awake and being watched.

Other Tips

- Changing your baby's position regularly will promote full head movement.
 - When your baby is sleeping, position your baby's head so he or she looks to the left one night and to the right the next night.
 - When changing your baby's diapers or dressing him or her, change the direction that your baby lies.
 - When bottle or breastfeeding your baby, alternate arms that you use to hold your baby.
- Limit the time your baby spends in car seats, bouncers and carriers when he or she is awake.
- Spend time holding your baby upright during the day.
- Use a front carrier (such as a Snuggli®) to carry your baby.
- Alternate which hip you carry your baby on. Your baby will want to look forward to where you are going or watch what you are doing. When your baby is on your left hip, he or she will turn his or her head to the left. When your baby is on your right hip, he or she will turn his or her head to the right.

Please talk with your baby's health care provider if you think your baby is developing a flat spot or if you have any questions or concerns.