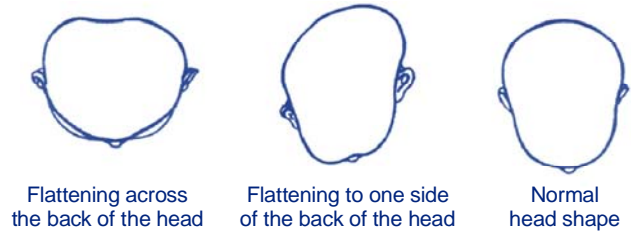


What you should know about the shape of your baby's head

To help lower the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), a healthy baby should be placed on his back to sleep. A baby who keeps his head in one position for too long can get a flat area on the back of his head.

What is a flat head?

A flat head is when there is a flat spot on one side of the back of the baby's head or across the back of the baby's head. This can happen in a few weeks to a few months. When the flattening is to one side, the baby may have changes to the position of one ear and to the shape of his face.



Why do some babies get a flat head?

- Some babies like to keep their head in one spot.
- Some babies are born with a flat spot on their head.
- Some babies are born too soon and have softer bones in their head.
- Some babies have a neck problem.
- Some babies spend too much time lying on their back when they are awake.

What can you do to prevent your baby from getting a flat head?

When your baby is sleeping:

- Change your baby's head position when you lay him down to sleep. For example, turn his head to the left, or place his head in a straight position, or turn his head to the right.
- Place your baby's head at the foot of the crib one day, and at the head of the crib the next day.

When your baby is awake:

A baby needs time to play on his tummy and his side. This playtime will help your baby grow stronger and learn to roll over, crawl, sit and stand.

- Start early and place your baby on his tummy to **play** when he is **awake** and you are there to watch over him. Try placing a small rolled towel under his chest or lay him on your chest.
- Begin slowly and if your baby cries, stop and try again later. He may like to do this after his bath or after a diaper change.
- **Never place him on his tummy or his side to sleep.**



- Change how you hold your baby when feeding and carrying your baby.
- Help your baby learn to sit when he can hold his head up. Make sure your baby does not sit in a baby seat or swing for a long time. Remember, car seats are for cars!



- Play with your baby by lying down, face-to-face, or by placing your baby on your legs and gently lifting him up and down.
- Place your baby on his side to play.

- Change toys and mobiles so your baby will move their head to look in different directions.
- Help your baby to turn his head by getting him to follow your voice or look at you.



What can you do if your baby has a flat area on their head?

- See your doctor if your baby holds his head to one side, has difficulty turning his head, or if you are worried about the shape of his head.

Does having a flat head cause problems?

Some babies who have a severe flat spot on their head may need to wear a special helmet. In most cases, having a flat spot on the head will not hurt your baby's brain growth. The shape of your baby's head will get better if you try to keep them off the flat side as much as possible. A round shape looks more normal.

Content adapted from "What you should know about the shape of your baby's head" produced by Ottawa Public Health. Photographs used with permission from Cranial Technologies, Inc., Arizona.

For more information, call Ottawa Public Health Information at **613-580-6744** / TTY: 613-580-9656