



Promoting Good Head Shape for Your Baby

With the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) promotion of safe sleep the risk of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) has greatly decreased. Because of this babies are less likely to be placed on their tummies when awake and alert. The increased availability of carriers, car seats and baby equipment places sustained pressure on babies' heads and can limit their activity and head movement. Subsequently, an increased number of babies have developed problems with neck movement, head shape and overall motor development.

There are several reasons why your baby's head may not be perfectly round, such as:

- Position in utero
- Sleeping in one position (back)
- Prolonged position in carrier or equipment
- Short muscles
- Muscle weakness

The following activities will help promote a more symmetrical and round head shape:

1. Make sure your baby gets tummy time every day. Begin tummy time for a few minutes, several times a day, when your baby is awake, until the baby tolerates longer sessions. Always start play time on baby's tummy.
2. Do not let your baby stay in a carrier or equipment for prolonged periods.
3. Holding your baby when they are awake to help take pressure of their head.
4. Place toys and interesting objects in such a position so that your baby has to turn their head, move the location of the objects to encourage your baby to move her head.
5. If your child has flattening on one side of their head. Position the crib and changing table so that your baby must turn her head away from the flat side to look at items of interest. Place toys so to encourage your baby to turn away from the flat side during tummy, mat and play time.
6. Check to be sure your baby can turn and tilt her head to both sides equally. If not, follow up with your pediatrician.

If your baby has persistent unevenness in their head shape as they approach 3 months consult with your Doctor, as a referral to physical therapy may be warranted. Some infants may benefit from helmet use and this should be started by 4-6 months of age for the best results.

Resources:

- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/healthy-baby/art-20045964?pg=2>
- SIDS and Other Sleep –Related Infant Deaths: Updated 2016 Recommendations for a Safe Infant Sleeping Environment.
- Task Force on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
- *Pediatrics*: originally published online October 24, 2016. doi: 10.1542/ peds.3016-2938

