

FLATTENING OF THE SKULL

Some infants develop a flattened area on the skull in the back of the head. The majority of these infants have a condition called *positional or deformational plagiocephaly*. The flat spot occurs because the infant holds his head in the same position much of the time, putting excess pressure on the soft bones of the skull.

This flattened area usually becomes more rounded as the baby grows and spends less time with his head against a firm surface.

Proper positioning can prevent or reverse flattening of the skull. Here are some suggestions:

- When you place your baby in the crib, put his head toward your left one time and toward the right the next time.
- Allow your baby to practice head control with daily tummy time. This will improve strength and development. Tummy time should always be supervised and occur while the baby is *awake*.
- Alternate the way you place your baby on the changing table, so he must turn his head to the right one time and to the left the next time as he tries to see you. If you change your baby with his feet pointing toward you, rotate him slightly to the left one time and to the right the next time.
- During playtime, try to approach your baby from the side he prefers not to turn.
- Alternate the hip or arm in which you hold your baby to encourage him to turn his head both ways.
- When using a car seat, a head support may be needed to prevent your baby from resting his head on the same spot each time

Some babies will have tight neck muscles that make it difficult for them to alternate head positions. This may be especially true for babies who were cramped in the uterus, such as multiple births, large babies, babies with unusual positions in the uterus, etc. If the neck muscles are tight, exercise may be needed to stretch them. Your doctor may ask you to gently rotate your baby's head to the right and left, or to tilt his head side-to-side, as if to tilt the ear toward the shoulder. Physical therapy may also be recommended.

If growth and time, along with positioning and exercises, fail to correct the problem, your doctor may recommend a helmet. This custom molded device evens out the pressure on the baby's skull, allowing it to become rounded again. Only a small number of infants require this type of treatment.

Rarely, the flattened area of the skull is due to a condition called *craniosynostosis*, where the bones of the skull fuse together too soon. This results in lopsided growth of the head. If this condition is suspected, further evaluation may be recommended.