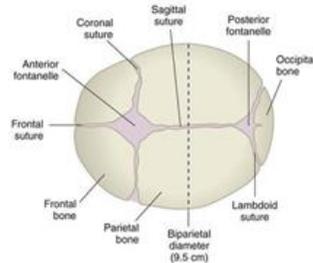


# Preventing Flat Head

## What is 'flat head'?

When babies are born, their skull is comprised of 6 bones that cover the brain. These bones are also still soft (as they need to continue to grow and then fuse together later in life) and can be affected by pressure. Babies also have little control of their neck muscles to start and usually turn their heads to one side when placed on their back. Because of these things, your baby's skull may flatten. This is known as 'flat head' or *positional plagiocephaly*.



A little bit of flattening will go away on its own. More serious flattening may require your baby to wear a special helmet to help reshape the skull but still may not go away completely.

Regardless of severity, flat head caused by positioning **WILL NOT** affect a baby's brain or development.

## Can 'flat head' be prevented?

Approximately 50% of babies will develop some form of flat spot on their heads. Most cases can be prevented with preventive measures, but it is not always completely preventable.

Babies like to look at interesting things and will turn their heads to items of interest - high contrast coloured items, ceiling fans, the door where you come and go.

Sometimes babies can also have a preference as to which way they lay on their head to sleep due to having 'tighter' neck muscles on one side (often caused by their position in utero).

## How can I prevent or improve my baby's 'flat head'?

Alternate where you place your baby in their crib every day. One day face their head at the 'head' of the crib. The next day, place them with their head at the 'foot' of the crib. Keep alternating every day.



You might want to attach a high contrast toy to the side of the crib where you want them to look. Black and white toys or a mobile on the side of the crib works well.



Ensure you are doing tummy time with your baby when they are awake, for at least 10 to 15 minutes each time and at least 3 times a day.

Not only does tummy time help prevent a flat spot on the head, it strengthens your baby's neck and arm muscles which allows them to meet their motor development milestones.



You might even consider taking your baby to a craniosacral therapist, osteopath, or registered massage therapist who is certified in treating babies/children. These services are not covered by OHIP, but covered under many extended benefit plans.

## **Is it safe to use a special pillow or positioner to prevent 'flat head'?**

There are many different positioners and pillows available on the market said to prevent or reduce the incidence of flat head. While these products are well intended, they are not approved or recommended by Health Canada and presents a health hazard to your baby

## **When should I contact my doctor?**

If your baby still develops flat spots on their head regardless of the above suggestions, it is a good idea to reach out to your child's doctor.

## **Where can I find more information?**

[https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pregnancy-and-babies/preventing\\_flat\\_heads](https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pregnancy-and-babies/preventing_flat_heads)