

Your baby's plagiocephaly will stop worsening once he is not favouring just the one position. His head shape will start to improve, with growth, up to the age of 5 years. Some flattening is part of normal variation of head shape, and will be largely disguised by their hair. It should be noted that this is cosmetic and will not cause pressure on the brain or any developmental problems.



Association of Paediatric  
Physiotherapists

## Head Turning Preference and Plagiocephaly



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When your baby is born, labour often causes his head to be pointy or elongated for a short time. This is normal and settles within the first few weeks after birth. If you have noticed that your baby is developing a flat spot on the back or side of his head, it could be due to a head turning preference and a sign of plagiocephaly



Plagiocephaly is a disorder in which one side of a baby's head is flattened. It is caused when a baby spends a lot of time lying in the same position. As babies' skulls are soft, they are susceptible to being 'moulded' into a flat shape. The ear on the flattened side may be pushed forward and the face may be asymmetric.

### What causes it?

**Tight neck muscles**- your baby may need stretches to his neck muscles which will be taught by your physiotherapist.

**Sleep position**- your baby spends much of his time asleep and if he always lies in the same position, it can cause asymmetric flattening.

**Prematurity**- babies born too soon have softer skulls, which are more prone to moulding, and they may have been too poorly initially to be moved much.

**Lack of 'tummy time'**- although it is recommended that all babies sleep on their backs, it is essential that they should experience being on their tummy while they are awake, at least every day.

**Car seats**- today's prolonged use of car seats mean your baby is unable to move freely and is susceptible to head moulding. Try to minimise use to when baby is actually in the car.

### What can I do?

It is helpful to encourage your child to use different positions so his head is not always lying in the same position. The following examples are for a right head turning preference. If your baby prefers to look to the left, reverse the instructions.

Turn your baby's cot so he has to look to the left to see you approach.

Put interesting cot toys or a mobile on your baby's left side to encourage him to look that way. When you put your baby on the floor think which way he will turn to see the TV, window or lights. Try to position him so all these sort of visual stimuli are on his left

Try turning your baby's head to the left when he is asleep. He may well turn it back but any time spent with his head to the left is helpful.

Set aside a time every day to actively play with your baby on his tummy. Encourage him to look up and especially to the left. Make sure his elbows are under his shoulders so he can prop himself up. If he is struggling, you can put a rolled up towel under his chest to help.

Try not to use a car seat for anything apart from being in the car. You can roll up a small towel to put behind the head hugger on the right to prevent your baby resting with his head on the right and get his head more to the middle.

Your baby will benefit from any time that avoids his head turned to the right. Try putting him on his left hand side when he is awake. You may need to put a cushion behind him to stop him rolling back, place an interesting toy in front of him.

When holding your baby against your shoulder put him on your right as he will turn to his left to look around and your cheek will prevent him turning to the right.

Use a baby sling sometimes instead of the car seat or buggy when you go out, it is a different position to avoid the constant pressure on one side of baby's head.

If your baby is bottle fed, hold him with his head on your right arm and encourage him to look round to his left for his bottle, and to see you.