



THE PROMISE

OSTEOPATHY'S PROMISE TO CHILDREN

Osteopathic Center San Diego
3706 Ruffin Road, San Diego CA 92123

PLAGIOCEPHALY (FLATTENED HEAD) FACT SHEET AND AT-HOME EXERCISES

WHAT IS POSITIONAL OR DEFORMATIONAL PLAGIOCEPHALY (FLATTENED HEAD)?

Positional or deformational plagiocephaly (play-gee-o-SEF-uh-lee) is a flat area on the back or on the side of a baby's head. This may happen from laying on their back to sleep, long or difficult labors or sometimes how they were positioned when in the womb. It can be more commonly seen if the parent was pregnant with multiple children, the baby was premature, or if they have torticollis (tight muscle that limits neck motion). Some babies have this after birth or it can develop weeks later. Once plagiocephaly develops, it can worsen if not addressed. It has increased recently due to the American Academy of Pediatrics' sleep guidelines which include placing the infant on their back when sleeping. Even if your baby has plagiocephaly, it is recommended you continue to place your baby on their back for safe sleep. This brochure contains tips and tricks for exercises and activities to do at home to help with plagiocephaly.

WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME TO HELP MY CHILD?

There are several ways to help reshape your baby's head. You should start these positioning activities as soon as possible to help reshape your baby's head while it is still very flexible. As the baby gains more control of their body (including their head and neck), they will be able to move around more and look to both sides. Lying on the side of the head that is rounder will help re-shape the flatter part of the head. Some activities to start are:



TUMMY TIME

A baby needs supervised awake tummy time daily to help stretch and strengthen the back, neck, and arm muscles and help keep a round head shape. Start slowly for 1-2 minutes at a time, 4-5 times per day. The goal is to work towards 10-minute sessions several times a day. Give the baby something interesting to play with while on their tummy to encourage turning their head away from the flat spot.



SITTING UP AND CRAWLING

Plagiocephaly improves as a baby's motor skills, such as sitting and crawling, develop and they are spending less time lying flat on their back. Encouraging frequent & supervised tummy time is critical to help develop these skills which help your baby spend less time on their backs.

PLAY TIME ON THE FLOOR



When your baby is awake, limit the time they spend in devices such as swings or bouncers. As soon as your child is able to, have them sit up to play. Sitting takes the pressure off the back of your baby's head and builds strength in the neck and trunk. Infants should not be sitting all the time. They also need supervised play time on the floor to work on reaching, rolling, and pushing up on their arms while on their tummies.



SAFE SLEEP

Continue to place the baby on their back to sleep. When they're sleeping on their back, you can gently turn their head away from the flat spot. DO NOT use anything to hold the head in that position (pillows, stuffed animals or blankets) because these can block the face and make breathing difficult. You do not need to keep waking up at night to reposition their head. Once your child is able to roll over successfully, they are able to safely sleep on their tummies if they put themselves in that position (you do not need to roll them back over).



DURING DIAPER CHANGES

Move toys to the baby's non-preferred side to encourage turning to look at the toy. This will take pressure off the flattened side of the head.



WHEN YOU HOLD YOUR BABY

Make sure there's no pressure on the flat part of the head. Give fun things to look at so the baby turns their head in all directions. While supervising, place a toy to the side opposite the flat area to encourage them to look more in that direction.



WHEN BOTTLE FEEDING

You can change the side of your body on which you hold the baby for feeding. For example, if the baby has a flat area on their left, hold the baby on your left so your arm is placing pressure on their right.



WHEN BREAST/CHESTFEEDING

You can consider different positions, such as the football hold, for breast/chestfeeding. If your baby prefers feeding on one side versus the other, try to start with the side that is more difficult for them so they are hungrier and more motivated to work for it.



EXERCISES

If your baby has torticollis (tight neck muscle limiting neck motion), it is important to treat it. Encourage your child to turn toward the side they do not prefer. Your doctor may teach you exercises to stretch your child's neck or refer you to a physical therapist. Many babies need daily stretching with their parents to improve torticollis.

IS THERE ANYONE ELSE WHO CAN HELP?

You can schedule an Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT) visit with a physician on our team (a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine - a DO). You will come to the Osteopathic Center San Diego (3706 Ruffin Road, San Diego, CA 92123) for your appointment. To make an appointment, please call: (619) 583-7611, or visit our website: osteopathiccenter.org and fill out our "Physician Referral Inquiry" form at the bottom of the page with questions or to schedule a visit with one of our physicians. We would love to provide an evaluation to determine if OMT is the right option for your child.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) is a form of manual medicine in which a trained physician uses his or her hands to gently diagnose areas of restriction in an individual's body. The physician then uses his or her hands to manually correct the restriction with gentle touch, to improve body function. Most treatments will be done with the infant laying on their back but alternatively they may be in the parents' or physicians' arms while treating to maximize comfort for all. All techniques used are gentle, applying no more force than would be used to test a tomato for ripeness. You will be allowed to touch and interact with your child while they are receiving OMT.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT PLAGIOCEPHALY?

ARTICLES/WEBSITES:

1. From the American Academy of Pediatrics:
2. Podcast on Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine (OMM) from Nationwide Children's Hospital:
NOTE: There is an audio recording and a transcript available. At around 46 minutes there is a discussion on plagiocephaly.
3. Diagnosis and treatment of positional plagiocephaly:



ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS:

There are several parental support groups out there that may be a helpful resource.