

Plagiocephaly

Information for parents from the Paediatric Orthopaedic Service

You, your GP, or your paediatrician have noticed that your baby has a different shaped head. This leaflet outlines why this can happen to some babies and gives advice on how you can help improve this for your baby.

This change in head shape is commonly known as Plagiocephaly. Plagiocephaly is a cosmetic condition, it only affects your baby's appearance not their brain development.

Why does this happen?

There are a number of different reasons for this, some of which are discussed below.

- Labour can cause your baby's head to change shape. It can become more elongated (longer and thinner than usual) or pointy. This generally settles down after a few weeks.
- Sometimes you may notice that your baby is developing a flat spot on the back or side of their head after birth. This may be because your baby prefers to turn their head one way more than the other, along with the fact that they move less.
- Premature babies are more likely to develop Plagiocephaly as their skulls are slightly softer than those babies born at term (born at 39 to 41 weeks). Premature babies can also take longer to start to move.

What can I do to help?

- Encourage your baby to change their head position regularly, so they are not in the same position all the time.
- Keep how long your baby is in their car seat to a minimum. Use a baby sling or buggy when you are out and about instead. In the car seat, use a towel to hold their head to a particular side, if they look like they are only holding their head one way.
- Turn your baby's cot so they look to the other side. For example if your baby prefers to turn to the left only, move their cot so they turn to the right.



- Encourage tummy time every day when your baby is awake, even if this is only for short periods (see photo below). Little and often through the day works well when they are a newborn and often not that happy on their tummy. Place toys in front of them to encourage them. Prop their elbows under their shoulders, so they can help themselves stay up. There are rolls you can buy to help this, or use a rolled up towel or small ball.



- While your baby is sleeping you can change the position of their head to face the opposite way; they will probably turn it back again but encouraging the movement is good. It is advised that babies sleep on their backs.
- Change the position you hold your baby. When on your shoulder, encourage them to turn both ways. Try and get them to rest in a position facing the way they usually avoid.
- If you are bottle feeding your baby, try and swap around the arm you hold and feed them with. If you are breast feeding try different positions to try and change their head position.

What will happen over the coming months?

Once your baby starts moving around more their Plagiocephaly will stop getting worse, as they are no longer favouring one side. As they grow, their head shape will start to improve. Changes can happen up to the age of four to five years. But remember, it is normal to have some flattening of your head.

Further information

- **The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists**
Web: apcp.csp.org.uk/
- **Safe to Sleep**
Web: safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov/
- **Born to Move App**
An NHS app to help parents and carers with their newborn babies right up to pre-school
Web: www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/kent-baby/born-to-move/

Contact details

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact the Paediatric Orthopaedic Team via email ekh-tr.PaedMSK@nhs.net

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation