



Preventing flat heads in babies who sleep on their backs

Most parents know that the safest way to put their baby to sleep is on its back. Babies who sleep on their backs are much less likely to die of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Babies who always sleep with their head to the same side can develop flat spots. This hand-out tells you how to prevent this from happening.

WHAT IS SIDS?

SIDS is when a baby dies suddenly and unexpectedly – for no clear reason, even after an investigation. Babies who die of SIDS are usually under one year old. SIDS is sometimes called crib death.

WHY DO SOME BABIES DEVELOP FLAT SPOTS ON THEIR HEADS?

Babies' skulls are very soft and the bones can be affected by pressure. Babies also have weak neck muscles. Because of this, they tend to turn their heads to one side when placed on their backs.

If babies always turn their heads to the same side, the skull may flatten. This is known as a 'flat head'. The medical term for this is positional plagiocephaly.

A little bit of flattening goes away on its own. More serious flattening may be permanent, but it will not affect a baby's brain or development.

CAN A BABY'S FLAT HEAD BE PREVENTED?

Yes. A simple way to prevent your baby from getting a flat head is to change the position of the baby's head each day.

Because babies like to have something interesting to look at, they tend to turn their head to look out into their room rather than toward the wall. This way they can see you as you come and go.

Here's how you can change the position of your baby's head while still giving her the same 'view'.

- One day, place your baby with her head at the head of the crib.
- The next day, place your baby with her head at the foot of the crib.
- Each day, alternate your baby's orientation in the crib.
- Check to make sure that your baby is always looking out into the room.

You might also put a mobile on the side of the crib facing the room to encourage your baby to look that way.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO PREVENT MY BABY FROM GETTING A FLAT HEAD?

Babies should also have supervised 'tummy time' when they are awake, several times a day.

Not only will time on the tummy help prevent a flat spot on the head, but it is important for your baby's development.

If your baby still develops flat spots, talk to your paediatrician or family physician.

A NOTE FROM THE DOCTOR: ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO HELP REDUCE THE RISK OF SIDS?

The most important thing you can do to reduce the risk of SIDS is place your baby on his back to sleep. You should also:

- make sure that nobody smokes around your baby;
- avoid putting too many clothes and covers on your baby; and
- breastfeed your baby, it may give some protection against SIDS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

- Health Canada: <www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/childhood-youth/cyfh/sids/>
- The SIDS Foundation: <www.sidscanada.org>
- Caring for Kids (Canadian Paediatric Society): <www.caringforkids.cps.ca>

This information was developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society in collaboration with The Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, the Canadian Institute of Child Health and Health Canada.

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Also available on the Internet at www.caringforkids.cps.ca

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