



Plagiocephaly

Commonly Asked Questions

★ What is plagiocephaly?

Plagiocephaly is a flattening of a portion of the head, usually in the back and sides. With plagiocephaly, there is often seen increased rounding (bossing) of the forehead, increasing fullness of the cheek and forward and upward or downward movement of the ear on the same side as the flatness. Brachycephaly is a flattening of the very back of the head with a widening of the head overall.

★ How is plagiocephaly caused?

There are several causes including positioning in the womb, or repeated resting on a singular area of your child's head. Baby's heads are soft, and the bones have not fused together; if your child does not move their head while laying on their back or while playing, the pressure of the surface can lead to a flattening in that area.

★ Does my child need therapy?

Beyond overall cosmetics, there is little evidence to say what the long-term effects are of head asymmetry that is left untreated. If there is an imbalance in the position of the eyes or ears, your child may have issues with vision or balance respectively. A child's head is the most malleable until the age of 1 year, so the earlier the assessment, diagnosis or management, the better the possible outcome for your child.

★ What would treatment involve?

Initially, determining the cause of your child's head asymmetry and addressing the cause can prevent further flattening in that area. Second, education on positioning and carrying techniques that promote a tummy time position. Depending on the severity, your pediatrician may refer your child for a head-shaping helmet. This orthotic management is comfortable, non-invasive and can be very successful at correcting asymmetry. In severe cases, or if the asymmetry is caused by craniosynostosis (a premature fusion of the bones in the head), surgical correction may be required.

★ How long does therapy last?

It is important to remember that every child is different, and the underlying cause may change the length of care. Your child's outcomes will also depend on consistency with the home exercise program and attendance at therapy sessions.

** If you believe that your child is beginning to develop asymmetries of the face or head, it is important to inform your pediatrician as there could be more serious causes of the asymmetry that need to be addressed.