



Position statement

Plagiocephaly

There is good evidence that putting babies to sleep on their backs reduces the risk of sudden infant death or cot death. Parents should be made aware however of the potential for babies to develop flat-head syndrome (plagiocephaly) because of their baby lying, or sleeping, on their back, with their head always to one side.

Parents should also be made aware about prevention and treatment of plagiocephaly. For example, parents should be encouraged to consider using a soft baby carrier, as this kind of contact is good for enhancing sensitivity to the baby's needs, to put their babies down on their fronts on a firm, flat surface as this is good for their motor development and these positions help to prevent problems such as flat-head syndrome. In addition, babies can be discouraged from turning their heads to the same side for every sleep and feeding positions can be varied so that very young babies are not always in the same position.

Some doctors advocate the use of a helmet to correct the bone shape and parents sometimes welcome this. However, there is little research evidence to draw on and other doctors are sceptical about whether helmets are necessary or effective, believing that the condition generally corrects itself in time.

Background information to this position statement

Plagiocephaly – which is also known as 'flat-head syndrome' – is the name for the condition when either the front, back or the side of a baby's head becomes flattened.

Treatment options for plagiocephaly include using a special helmet (this approach is not available on the NHS) to encourage the bones of the head back into a more rounded shape; medical opinion is divided however about the effectiveness of such helmets or whether they are even necessary. NHS Direct, for example, says 'there is little good scientific evidence to support how effective this method is and most babies' head shapes will improve naturally in their own time.' <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/articles/article.aspx?articleId=1892>

NCT is here to support parents. We don't tell them what to do or think - through our classes, branches and helplines, our volunteers and qualified staff give parents accurate impartial information so that they can decide what is best for their family. Through us, they can join a support network of other parents nearby, which can be a lifeline in the early years.

We are the UK's largest parenting charity and, being independent, we have an influential voice in campaigning and lobbying on the issues that parents care about.

For more information visit
www.nct.org.uk

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