

Flat head syndrome

Sleep on his back and let him play on his tummy

Flat head syndrome can occur in the womb or can be caused by a baby sleeping, resting and playing in one position.

Many babies develop a flattened head when they are a few months old, usually from sleeping on their back. FHS happens when the back or one side of the baby's head is squashed against a firm mattress for a long time, which eventually forces the soft bone of the skull to flatten.

It often corrects itself over time and is usually nothing to worry about.

The solution is not to change your baby's sleeping position from lying on their back at night. It is important for babies to sleep on their back as this reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Put your baby to sleep on his back and let him play on his tummy.

No treatment is normally needed. Your baby's skull should naturally correct itself over time. You can take some simple measures to take pressure off the flattened part of their head and encourage them to try different positions (see Health Visitor's tips).

GP says

In cases of craniosynostosis, where the plates of your baby's skull have fused too early, surgery will be needed to unlock and move the bones. This is a more serious condition but is very rare. Talk to your Health Visitor or GP if you are concerned and have tried the measures suggested.

Health Visitor says

Increase 'tummy time' - put your baby on his front to play.

Supervise him at all times and don't let him fall asleep like this.

- Get down to your baby's level for face-to-face fun so he'll enjoy lying on his tummy.
- Use a sling to carry your baby upright so he is not always on his back in a car seat or pram.
- Do lots of active play with your baby on your lap.
- Change the position of toys and mobiles in their cot to encourage them to turn their head to the non-flattened side.
- Don't use a car seat except when travelling.

It may take 6-8 weeks before noticing any improvement.

1

I have heard about helmets that a baby can wear to help.

2

Their use is controversial, expensive and there is still not enough evidence to prove it will correct the problem.

3

If you have tried the Health Visitor's tips and are still worried talk to your Health Visitor or GP.

Source: DoH Birth to five edition 2009.