

# The Positioning Advice for Baby Hip Development

## A Parent's Guide

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Your baby has been assessed by a Physiotherapist who specialises in hip examination. The physiotherapist has identified that your baby may be at risk of problems with hip development and this can often be due to the way they lie.

This leaflet helps to explain why this is and how you can help your baby.

### Why does my baby lie asymmetrically?

There are many reasons that your baby may not lie straight and this can often be linked to the position that they were in during pregnancy. This includes being breech, having reduced fluid volumes around your baby and being a bigger baby who likely became moulded towards the end of your pregnancy as space became limited.

### Why does this cause a problem to their hip joints?

The hip joint is made up of a ball which sits into a socket (cup). As a baby's hip joint is made of cartilage (which is soft and malleable) the development can be affected by the way the baby is lying. If your baby continues to lie asymmetrically the cup part of the joint may not develop properly.

Although your baby is not in any discomfort, this could cause them difficulties as they grow if it is not dealt with at this stage.

### What can I do to help?

Your physiotherapist will have shown you positioning which will help improve your baby's posture. This in-turn should help their hip development.

### Tummy time

Your baby is safe to be placed on their tummy from birth. They should **always** be supervised when on their tummy and **never** be allowed to sleep on their tummy. Babies should always be placed on their **back to sleep**.



Tummy time is excellent for hip development and should be done on a firm surface such as a play mat or blanket on the floor for approximately 1 hour per day. This can be split up into achievable blocks of time. Tummy time helps to stretch the hips up and out into a 'frog leg' position which puts the hips in the best position for the hip socket to develop.

Tummy time is also excellent for developing strength in your baby's neck and back. You can play with stimulating toys to attract your baby's attention or facilitate them to turn their head to one side to relax.

Most babies will enjoy spending time lying on their tummy on your chest. Whilst this is a nice position for you and baby and you may notice them lifting their head too, the hips get a much better stretch when lying on a firm surface.

## Supported lying

If your baby rolls to one side, place a rolled up muslin or small blanket under the same side from shoulder to buttock. This will help your baby to lie in the middle. This should be placed underneath the cot sheet to keep it in position. Do not place anything up by the side of their head.



*Left:* If baby has a preference for rolling to their left, place blanket down the left side



*Right:* If baby has a preference for rolling to their right, place blanket down the right side

Alternatively, you can use a rolled up small blanket or towel and place in a 'horse-shoe' shape around your baby stopping at shoulder level. This should be placed underneath the cot sheet to keep it in position. Do not place anything up by the side of their head.



## What is plagiocephaly/brachycephaly?

This is when a baby's skull becomes flattened as a result of skull moulding. It makes the shape of the baby's head flat on one side (plagiocephaly) or at the back (brachycephaly).

This can occur due to moulding in the womb, but more commonly occurs as a result of the position that your baby lies in. If they have a preference for lying with their head to the same side, their head can become flat on that side. If they tend to sleep with their head centrally looking up to the ceiling, it can become flat at the back.

We believe the main cause of this is the amount of time babies spend lying on their backs or in car seats/bouncy chairs in the first few months of life. During this time the bones in their skull are soft and are easily moulded into a flattened shape due to the pressure from the surface they are resting on.

This is a cosmetic condition that should correct itself if you follow the advice that is given.

Most cases can be avoided by implementing the positioning advice given in this leaflet.

If you are concerned about the shape of your baby's head, or notice that your baby is unable to turn their head to one side, then discuss this with your Health Visitor or contact your GP.

## Positioning advice

Ensure your baby spends time in a variety of positions, particularly during the first few months.

Time spent in bouncy seats should be limited, as this will cause pressure on the back of your baby's head.

Babies should only be in car seats when travelling.

If your baby seems to have a head turn preference, change the position of the light or mobile in the room to the side your baby favours less to encourage them to turn their head.

Change the way your baby's head turns when they are sleeping by gently turning their head so that they are not always turned to the same side.

Allow plenty of time with your baby lying on your chest, tummy time on the floor or sitting supported on your knee so they are not having pressure on the back of their head.

Regular tummy time can not only support the natural development of your baby's hips but it encourages the development of strength in the muscles in their neck and back.

Tummy time should always be when your baby is **awake and supervised**.

If you would like to use a baby carrier/sling it is fine to do so, providing your baby's legs are well supported along the length of their thighs.

## **Contact information**

If you require more information please contact the physiotherapist:

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