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Collaborative Care For Successful Futures

PLAGIOCEPHALY:

UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING FLAT SPOTS ON BABIES' HEADS

Plagiocephaly, commonly known as a flat spot, can develop on a baby's head when they spend too much time lying in the same position, typically on their back. Several factors contribute to this, including:

1. Lack of caregiver knowledge:

Many caregivers may not fully understand the importance of tummy time. This position is crucial for a baby's development, as it aids in building muscle strength, control, and fosters body awareness and visual spatial concepts. However, some babies may not tolerate tummy time well, leading caregivers to avoid it, inadvertently contributing to the development of flat spots.

2. Over reliance on containers:

It's common for caregivers to use devices like swings or bouncers to keep babies contained and safe. While convenient, prolonged use of these containers limits the baby's opportunity to develop muscle control and body awareness, increasing the risk of developing flat spots.

3. Muscle weakness or tightness:

Babies who haven't developed adequate head, neck, and trunk control may struggle to reposition themselves, leading to prolonged periods on their backs. This can result in flat spots and even muscle shortening in the neck (torticollis), exacerbating the issue.

4. Tongue ties or feeding/digestion concerns:

Babies with oral structural issues may be at higher risk of developing muscle tightness in their necks, often favoring one side and causing a flat spot. Digestive issues like reflux can also contribute to positional dependency.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The foremost step is educating caregivers about the importance of tummy time. Pediatric physical therapists play a crucial role in assessing and devising treatment plans to improve tolerance for tummy time and enhance overall development. The physical therapist can take measurements and make recommendations based on the trend of change in the baby's head shape along with their overall progress with muscle strengthening and motor control. An oral structure assessment by a speech-language pathologist trained in orofacial myology and infant feeding is essential to identify and address any oral restrictions.

If necessary, a shaping helmet may be recommended after a full assessment. The child must see an orthotist to actually be measured and fit for a shaping helmet and adjustments are made on a weekly basis by the orthotist. Our staff work closely with the orthotic company to ensure adjustments are correlating with the expected outcomes. Some insurance companies require a referral to the pediatric plastic surgery department for an initial recommendation of a shaping helmet. This helmet helps correct head shape and is most effective when initiated between 8 and 14 months of age.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERVENTION:

Failure to address plagiocephaly can lead to long-term issues such as muscle restrictions and compensatory strategies, which may require more extensive intervention later in life.

By addressing plagiocephaly early on, caregivers can ensure optimal development and prevent future complications for their child.

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