

PLAGIOCEPHALY



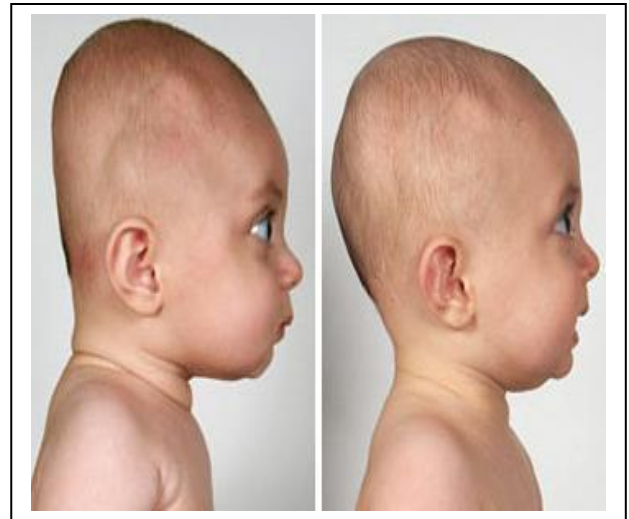
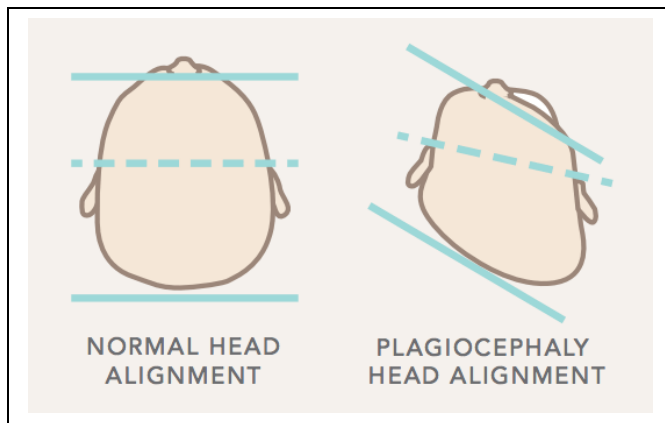
What is Plagiocephaly?

Plagiocephaly is the term used to describe cranial asymmetry or a misshapen head. This mild deformation of the skull may occur while still in utero, during delivery or be acquired in the early few months after birth. Most cases are caused by excessive, prolonged and uneven pressure on the skull, while some rare cases occur from uneven bone growth of the skull due to a suture that closes prematurely.

The neonate's skull has unfused bones with the ability to mould, assisting the passage through the birth canal. So it is quite normal to see a child's head temporarily misshapen immediately after birth. However if you fail to see the shape improve or in fact it become more deformed in time, we recommend an assessment with a paediatric-trained chiropractor.

Deformational plagiocephaly (the more common form) tends to peak at 4 months of age. Since some cases are caused by inutero constraint, an association is seen with higher birth weights, multiple births, hip dysplasia, scoliosis, club feet and perinatal clavicle fractures.

Plagiocephaly also affects males at twice the rate of females, presumably because of larger head sizes. However approximately 80% of deformational plagiocephaly babies begin with a normal head shape at birth. In these cases, we suspect prolonged labour, excessive traction forces on the head and neck, and/or the use of extraction devices may be causative. These forces damage neck musculature and sprain upper neck joints, upsetting baby's ability to turn to either side.



The SIDs "back to sleep" campaign has been very successful in saving lives. However, when a baby sleeps on its back and is unable to rotate their head sufficiently due to neck dysfunction, this fixed position unfortunately does also contribute to the deformation of skull shape. Note - that is not to say don't sleep babies on their back!

Parents of children affected by plagiocephaly are most often concerned about the effects on the child's cosmetic appearance. But it is important to understand this is not just about aesthetics - Many studies show babies with significant plagiocephaly have higher rates of a wide range of developmental delays, muscle tone problems and learning difficulties.

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What can we do to help?

At Mona Vale Chiropractic and Natural Therapies, we firstly determine what type of plagiocephaly a child may have – whether they need to be referred to a paediatrician and if there is neck or cranial dysfunction.

We then diagnose which joints and soft tissues are involved and in which specific direction each joint may be misaligned.

By releasing muscles and restoring normal joint position and movement, head mobility is rebalanced.

Gentle cranial moulding techniques may be employed.

Home exercises may be given and regular tummy time is critical.

In our office, Dr Stefan Kohlhoff (Chiropractor) measures and plots head shape deformity so we can track progress over time. Best results are seen if we can begin to address this within the first 4 months of life.

On rare occasions referral for helmet therapy may be required but critically, helmets will only help with head shape and do not correct neck mobility, or reduce chance of developmental delay or learning difficulties. This highlights the importance of chiropractic care to restore upper neck function and balanced neural input to the brain.

For more information or if you are concerned about plagiocephaly and its effects on your child, please call our practice on 9979 7700.

We would be delighted to help you.

References

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