

## Positioning Your Baby

It has been nine months since Hurricane Sandy and there has been a significant increase in births. The media are attributing it to the power outages and inability to resume normal life during Hurricane Sandy. Whatever the reason may be, lots of babies are expected to be born this summer.

In preparation for a new baby, parents often go out and purchase new baby paraphernalia. Once the baby is born, the shopping continues. Some items to include on that shopping list are baby positioners.

Positioners for babies can be used from the time the baby leaves the hospital in the infant seat carrier. Because babies do not yet have the muscle control to support their own heads, they rely on external support. When the baby is being held, that support is usually a hand or an arm supporting the head, neck, and trunk. When a baby is in a seat or on the floor, that support is provided by a positioner.

The goal of a body positioner is to help keep the baby's head-neck-trunk in neutral alignment. Head positioners are used to alleviate any pressure that might be placed on the skull from the baby lying on his/her back for a prolonged period of time.

Babies can be born with a condition called congenital torticollis. Congenital torticollis occurs when the neck muscle that runs along the neck (sternocleidomastoid (SCM) muscle) is shortened. This brings your baby's head down and to one side. This condition can occur in utero as a result of the baby's position or can happen as a result of trauma to the SCM muscle during delivery. Torticollis can also develop from babies being kept in a "container" for prolonged periods of time. "Containers" are infant seat carriers, swings, bouncy seats, or any device that contains the child. When a baby is kept in a "container" without a positioner to keep their head in midline, they are more susceptible to developing torticollis. The baby's head may flop to one side and because they don't have the muscle strength/control yet, they cannot lift it up. They can therefore develop tightness in the SCM muscle which leads to shortening of the muscle.

Another condition known as Flat Head Syndrome or plagiocephaly can also develop independently or along with torticollis. Flat Head Syndrome occurs when there is asymmetrical distortion (flattening of one side) of the skull. It is characterized by a flat spot on the back or one side of the head. Babies can be born with plagiocephaly, like torticollis, as a result of positioning in utero or prolonged time spent in the birth canal. Plagiocephaly can also develop from babies spending too much time on their backs (in "containers" or on a surface). Because babies sleep on their backs, it is very important to have them spend their awake hours on their tummies.

There are many positioners on the market. As a physical therapist, I would like to recommend some positioners that I have found to be the best in the industry.

**Cradler® by Summer Infant, Inc**



- Offers support between the jaw line and shoulder, so heads don't flop uncomfortably forward or to the side
- Attaches to harness straps with closure tabs to keep the cushions in place
- Has been crash-tested for safety
- <http://www.summerinfant.com/gear-and-travel/accesories-disposables/cradler%C2%AE#sthash.B07ue7fy.dpuf>

#### **BenBat® Travel Friends Head and Neck Support**



- Ergonomic shape to secure the head and offer gentle neck support
- Ideal for stroller, car, plane, or any other way you travel
- Hidden magnets connect to provide chin support
- Can be used as the child's cuddly friend
- <http://store.ben-bat.com/c/travel-friends-on-the-go>

#### **BenBat® Baby Body Support**



- Total Body Support for the baby's fragile head, neck and back for ideal posture
- Adjustable and reattachable head support to follow the baby's growth & development
- Head rest can be used separately without the body part.
- <http://store.ben-bat.com/c/baby-body-support>

### The Turtle



- Turtle is a simple, comfortable beanie that helps prevent and treat early stages of flat head syndrome: plagiocephaly and torticollis.
- Turtle works by gently keeping your baby's head rotated to each side in order to reduce the amount of time spent in one static position.
- <http://www.turtle.com/turtle/>

If you have any questions regarding the proper positioning for your baby or if you notice a head tilt or flattening of your baby's head, please consult a medical professional. Your pediatrician and/or physical therapist can assess your baby's head and neck to make sure they are developing with the proper alignment. If your baby does have torticollis and/or plagiocephaly, a stretching, strengthening, and home exercise program should be implemented as a soon as possible to treat the condition and ensure the baby is developing properly.

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