Congress of Neurological Surgeons Systematic Review and Evidence-Based Guideline on the Management of Patients With Positional Plagiocephaly: The Role of Repositioning

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ABSTRACT

Background: Plagiocephaly, involving positional deformity of the calvarium in infants, is one of the most common reasons for pediatric neurosurgical consultation.

Objective: The objective of this systematic review was to answer the question: what is the evidence for the effectiveness of repositioning for positional plagiocephaly? Treatment recommendations are provided based on the available evidence.

Methods: The National Library of Medicine Medline database and the Cochrane Library were queried using MeSH headings and keywords relevant to repositioning as a means to treat plagiocephaly and brachycephaly. Abstracts were reviewed to identify which studies met the inclusion criteria. An evidentiary table was assembled summarizing the studies and the quality of evidence (Classes I–III). Based on the quality of the literature, a recommendation was rendered (Level I, II, or III).

Results: There were three randomized trials (Class I), one prospective cohort (Class II) and six retrospective cohort studies (Class III). Repositioning education was found to be equivocal to a repositioning device and inferior to a physical therapy program. Five out of the seven cohort studies comparing repositioning to helmet reported helmets to be better and take less time.

Conclusions: Within the limits of this systematic review, repositioning education is effective in affording some degree of correction in virtually all infants with positional plagiocephaly or brachycephaly. Most studies suggest a molding helmet corrects asymmetry more rapidly and to a greater degree than repositioning education. In a Class I study, repositioning education was as effective as repositioning education in conjunction with a repositioning wrap/device. Another Class I study demonstrated a bedding pillow was superior to physical therapy for certain infants. However, in keeping with The American Academy of Pediatrics’ warning against the use of soft positioning pillows in the sleeping environment, the task force recommends physical therapy over any positioning device.

Key Words: infants; plagiocephaly; positional; practice guidelines; repositioning

INTRODUCTION

Since the recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), made in 1992, that infants be placed on their back to sleep to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), plagiocephaly, involving positional deformity of the calvarium in infants, has been one of the most common reasons for pediatric neurosurgical consultation.¹ There are two
types of plagiocephaly. The most common is referred to as posterior plagiocephaly in which there is unilateral flattening of the parietooccipital region resulting in a rhomboid like shift of the calvarium with an anterior shift of the ipsilateral ear and bulging or bossing of the ipsilateral forehead. The second, less common variant, is sometimes called brachycephaly in which there is flattening of the entire occipital region resulting in a foreshortened head in the anterior-posterior dimension. However, the term ‘brachycephaly’ is also used in children with craniosynostosis. Henceforth, the authors will refer to non-synostotic calvarial positional deformity as plagiocephaly.

With very rare exception, plagiocephaly is a non-operative condition.\textsuperscript{2} Treatments include observation, physical therapy, particularly in the presence of torticollis, repositioning education or assistive devices and helmet therapy. High rates of parental satisfaction have been reported regardless of treatment type.\textsuperscript{3} Plagiocephaly has been the topic of numerous review articles.\textsuperscript{4-10} The purpose of this systematic review is to address the question: Does repositioning (education or with an assistive device) provide effective treatment for plagiocephaly?

\textbf{METHODS}

The Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) and the Section on Pediatric Neurosurgery initiated a systematic review of the literature and evidence-based guideline relevant to the management of positional plagiocephaly.

\textbf{Literature Search}

The task force collaborated with medical librarians to search the National Library of Medicine/PubMed database and the Cochrane Library for the period from 1966 to October 2014 using the MeSH subject headings and PubMed search strategies. Manual searches of bibliographies were also conducted. The search returned 38 articles; another 7 articles were found from a search through bibliographies. Twenty-four were excluded based on a review of the abstract. Ten articles satisfied inclusion for this systematic review and meta-analysis, including three randomized trials, one prospective cohort, and six retrospective cohort studies.

\textbf{Rating Quality of Diagnostic Evidence}

For diagnostic-type papers, evidence classification had definitions targeted toward diagnosis. The issues addressed by papers on diagnosis are related to the ability of the diagnostic test to successfully distinguish between patients who have and do not have a disease or pertinent finding. Additional information regarding the hierarchy classification of evidence can be located

RECOMMENDATION

1. Repositioning is an effective treatment for deformational plagiocephaly. However, there is Class I evidence from a single study and Class II evidence from several studies that repositioning is inferior to physical therapy and to use of a helmet, respectively.

   Strength of recommendation: Level I – high clinical certainty (repositioning being inferior to physical therapy); Level II – moderate clinical certainty (repositioning being inferior to helmet)

CONCLUSION

Positional plagiocephaly and brachycephaly are very common nowadays. This systematic review has demonstrated that either repositioning therapy or devices may be effective as sole therapy, improving cranial asymmetry, particularly for mild to moderate deformity.

Three randomized trials were included in our review. Each study compared different pairs of treatments. One trial found no difference between repositioning education and a repositioning device and another found repositioning education was inferior to a physical therapy intervention program. Even though there is a European randomized trial that suggested a bedding pillow was superior to daily stretching exercises in certain forms of positional deformity, we cannot at this time endorse any sleep positioning device as it would be contrary to the repeated recommendations set forth by the AAP Task Force on SIDS to avoid placing any soft surface bedding in the infant’s crib. Seven out of 10 articles that were included in this review evaluated repositioning education (without a specified device) as compared with a helmet or headband. The majority of these cohort studies (one prospective, six retrospective) demonstrated that helmet therapy provides a greater degree of correction in a shorter period of time than repositioning. Thus, helmets should be the preferred treatment for severe positional deformity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The guidelines task force acknowledges the CNS Guidelines Committee for their contributions throughout the development of the guideline, the AANS/CNS Joint Guidelines Committee for their review, comments, and suggestions throughout peer review, and Pamela Shaw, MSLIS, MS, and Mary Bodach, MLIS, for assistance with the literature searches. Also, the guidelines task force acknowledges the following individual peer reviewers for their contributions: Sepideh
Amin-Hanjani, MD; Maya Babu, MD; Kimon Bekelis, MD; Faiz Ahmad, MD; Daniel Resnick, MD; Patricia Raksin, MD; Jeffrey Olson, MD; Krystal Tomei, MD.

Disclosures
The authors do not have any disclosures to report.

REFERENCES


