

# “ A £4000 helmet cured my baby

Her baby's head was an odd shape and doctors told Alison Munro there was nothing she could do – but she found an unusual solution...

As I gently brushed the soft wisps of his hair, I knew that I couldn't ignore this any longer. My four-month-old baby Euan's head was definitely a strange shape.

The right side of his head was flat all the way round until it came to a peak at the back. 'You're imagining it,' I'd told myself when I'd first noticed it a couple of weeks before, trying to stem the panic. But the more I'd gazed at my baby, the more noticeable it had become.

Now he was even beginning to lean his head to the right when he was awake and would only sleep on that side in bed. I took him straight

I decided to get a second opinion through our private medical insurance. The second paediatrician agreed Euan's head would correct itself, but x-rayed his skull to rule out craniosynostosis, a condition in which the sutures fuse permanently. It was normal.

That should have been the end of it, but I just couldn't stop worrying. A nagging fear gnawed at me, so I started searching on the internet.

Euan's condition was called plagiocephaly, which literally means 'oblique head' in Greek.

There were clinics in the US and in Europe who treated babies who had it – and the younger they started, the better the results. 'I was right,'

He explained that they'd make a helmet for Euan which he'd have to wear 23 hours a day to mould his head back into shape. It would be made out of a plastic shell with a foam lining, and would have to be adjusted every fortnight. We'd also have to do special exercises four times a day to relax his neck muscles.

Euan's head was measured, and a plaster cast was taken. That was horrible. A kind of sock was placed over his head, and a hole cut out for his nose and mouth, so he could breathe. Then a mould was placed over his head, which was filled with plaster that had to set. It took 10 minutes and Euan screamed in terror the whole time. I was shaking as I tried to keep him calm.

We had to return in two weeks to collect the helmet. I was scared that Euan would hate it, but he didn't mind it at all, even though the only time we could take it off was to bath him and clean it.

Chris wrote Euan's name on the front of the helmet and stuck stickers on it and although we had a few strange looks, I had no regrets about the treatment. We were doing the best thing for Euan.

The change was almost instant. Within a fortnight I could see the difference. Each time we went to the clinic, they adjusted the inside of the helmet to make his head grow in the right direction.

Within three months, it was the correct shape. His treatment has finished and his

Euan made no fuss about wearing his special helmet



head now looks normal. We used up all our savings on the £4000 treatment. It's a lot of money, I know, but there's no price limit on improving our son's life.

**Alison, 32, from Cumbernauld, near Glasgow, is married to businessman Chris, 34. They have two sons, Greg, three, and Euan, 13 months**

## What if my baby's head didn't go back to normal? Could I leave his looks to chance?

to see our GP, who referred us to a paediatrician.

She explained that a baby's skull is so soft that it can become misshapen if he sleeps in the same position every night, as Euan did.

'It'll correct itself by the time he's two,' she assured me. 'And once his hair's thicker you won't even notice it.'

I should have been relieved. It wasn't serious – in fact, the paediatrician explained it was becoming more common due to the 'back to sleep' campaign that advises laying babies on their backs to prevent cot death. But what if his head didn't go back to a normal shape? Could I risk leaving Euan's looks to chance?

I told my husband Chris. 'There is something we can do.'

There was a clinic in Barcelona. I rang them the next day, and they put me in touch with a Belfast family whose little boy they'd treated for the same condition.

They couldn't praise the treatment enough, even though it was only available privately and meant flying to Spain every fortnight.

'We have to do the best for Euan,' I said to Chris. He agreed.

The next day we organised Euan's passport, withdrew £2400 savings, booked a cheap flight and flew out the following day. 'Your son's case is severe,' the neurological surgeon told us. 'But we can

### M&B HELP FOR YOU

Cases of deformational plagiocephaly have increased since the 'back to sleep' campaign was introduced to prevent cot death. It's important to put your baby to sleep on his back, but there are ways to stop his head becoming misshapen.

- Alternate the direction in which your baby is placed in his crib or cot.
- Alternate the arm you carry him in and rotate the position of his toys in his cot, pushchair and car seat so he doesn't spend more time on one side of his head.
- Provide supervised 'tummy time' while your baby's awake so that he's not always lying on the back of his head.

Written by Karen Pospisil Jones