



On the mend: Narene Lucas and her daughter Sophie after surgery in Wellington Hospital.

Picture: ROBERT KITCHIN

Sophie's choice after surgeons set to work

REBECCA PALMER

RIGHT now, four-year-old Sophie Lucas isn't particularly fussed about her head shape. But a "bulbous lump" on one side and a flat patch on the other meant she might have felt differently once she reached her teens.

Her parents, Brett and Narene Lucas, have had the foresight to get the problem fixed. The Invercargill girl had deformational plagiocephaly — better known as flat head. It is caused by babies sleeping on one side of their head repeatedly when their skull is still soft. As they get older, the bone hardens.

This week, Sophie had surgery at Wellington Hospital that has balanced out her head shape. Craniofacial surgeon Charles Davis and neurosurgeon Agadha Wickremesekera removed two large pieces of bone from the back of her head, moulded them to improve their shapes and then swapped them around.

"We're really rapt with the results," Mr Lucas said. "Sophie is feeling pretty



Out of shape: Surgeons' pictures of Sophie as a baby, before her head was corrected.

grotty at the moment and pretty sick but it's a visible improvement." She was looking forward to getting home to her brother and sister, and riding her bicycle.

The couple are not sure why Sophie developed a flat head. "Essentially as a baby she just favoured one spot ... Over time, it became malformed."

They first took her to a specialist when she was four months old. "We sought help

HEAD SCULPTING A8

pretty much straight away as soon as we noticed it," Mr Lucas said.

"The message I guess was, 'It will come right, just leave it. Turn her and keep her off that one spot and it should come right.' It never did."

It was only a few months ago, when they were referred to Mr Davis, that they considered surgery as an option.

The couple want other parents to know it is important to act when their child develops a misshapen head and to seek help if the problem does not improve.

Mr Davis said less serious forms of the condition had become very common as more parents let babies sleep on their backs to reduce the risk of cot death.

Mrs Lucas said she and her husband wanted the operation done while Sophie was still young. "We took the view that we're best to go with it now when she's young rather than in her teens."

