



When to Call: Does your baby need help with Tummy Time?

All new parents have heard the recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics: Babies should lie on their backs to sleep and their tummies to play. Many parents find that tummy time can be challenging for their little ones. Keep reading to find out why tummy time is so important and some ways to make it more enjoyable for both caregivers and babies. **Follow these great tips for tummy time:**

Tummy time starts early

You can start tummy time with your little bundle as early as the first week of life. Babies who have consistent tummy time from an early age get a head start on all of the benefits it provides, and they are able to tolerate it better than babies who are not as accustomed.



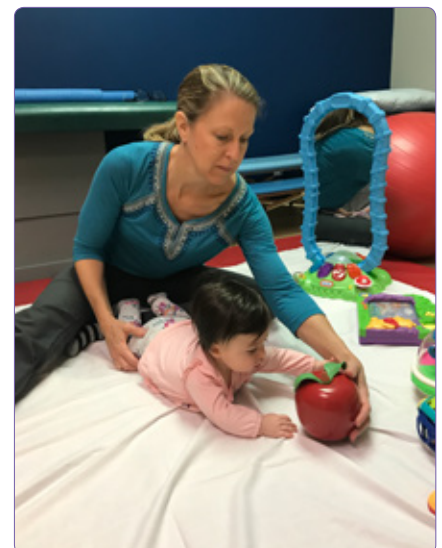
Make it interesting

Tummy time isn't limited to laying flat on the floor with some toys scattered around. Young babies enjoy looking at the contrast of a human face, and they can see best 8-10 inches in front of their face. This makes "tummy to tummy time" an ideal way to snuggle with your baby. You can lie back in a semi-reclined position and place baby on your chest. In any position during the first few weeks, your baby will probably keep his/her head turned to the side and cheek resting against the surface (your chest) - just make sure your baby takes turns turning his/her head toward each side. As your baby grows older and stronger, he/she will start to lift his/her head briefly and begin turning it from side to side.

You can hold your baby in a face-down position in your arms. Sometimes this position can even help calm a fussy baby! Baby can do tummy time in your lap or on the floor with a rolled towel or blanket under their chest. You can also "wear" your baby in a carrier. Look for a carrier that supports baby's bottom and thighs all the way to the knees. Baby's legs should be wide against your body with knees a little higher than baby's hips. You also want to be sure that the baby's head is well supported if he/she can't hold it up on his/her own yet.

Prevent a Flat Head

Since the beginning of the Safe to Sleep campaign (formerly known as the Back to Sleep campaign), many lives have been saved from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). You should always place your baby on his/her back for the safest sleep possible. Also, since the implementation of the Safe to Sleep campaign, plagiocephaly (flattening of the head) has become much more common. Because bones grow in response to the forces placed upon them, prolonged periods spent with babies' heads resting on the surfaces of cribs and positioning devices (bouncer, car seat, rock 'n' play) can result in flattening of the head. This is more common in babies who are unable to move their heads freely and spend large amounts of time with the same part of their head against a surface. A key measure to prevent this flattening is tummy time, which removes the pressure from the baby's head. Frequent tummy time is necessary to counteract the time spent during sleep with baby's head resting against a surface.



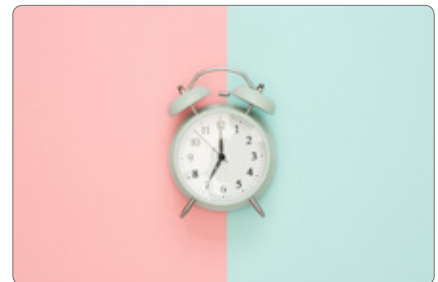
It's a Building Block

Tummy time is an important building block for future gross motor skills. Giving your baby tummy time from the start allows him/her to gain strength in the neck and back muscles as your baby learns to turn and lift his/her head from the surface. Hand, arm and shoulder strength follow as baby begins to press against the floor with arms and legs to lift the head higher and bring chest from the floor. Eventually, baby will press all the way onto hands and knees to prepare for crawling. Imagine the difficulty your baby would have in learning to crawl if he/she hadn't been preparing with the "exercise" of tummy time each day? And one step further - crawling gives babies the freedom to begin exploring their environment and have some control over their movement, which influences cognitive communication development. It's all related, and it starts with tummy time!



How much?

Consistency is key! Tummy time should be a normal part of your baby's routine. For example, say your baby's routine goes something like this: wake up, eat, playtime, then nap. When you get to "playtime," start with the tummy time instead of placing baby on his/her back or in a bouncer or swing. Supervise and play with your baby so that it's a positive experience, and move on to a different position after a few minutes if your baby becomes upset; then come back to tummy time again when baby is calm. As baby gets older, he/she should gradually be able to enjoy longer periods of tummy time. Your baby will also have longer periods of being awake, which will allow for more tummy time opportunities throughout the day. Aim for at least half of baby's awake time to be spent on his/her tummy, or being held and supported in an upright position.



What if I need help?

Do you feel that you need additional help with tummy time? Have you tried everything and all of your strategies just aren't working out? Schedule an appointment with a physical therapist - we can provide individualized positioning suggestions for you and your baby to get you back on track with tummy time and gross motor development.

Do you feel like your baby isn't lifting his/her head as well as they should, or notice that they are always turning the head to the same side. Do you notice a flatness or bulging on any area of the head? Is your baby beyond the newborn period, but still having trouble lifting the head from the surface? If you have concerns in any of these areas (strength, flexibility, symmetry, any head flattening, preference to turn or tilt the head to one side), schedule an appointment with a physical therapist today. We are always happy to evaluate your child to help you determine if there is - or isn't - a problem with their development. If there is truly a problem, the earlier we can get started with treatment, the faster and better the outcomes for your child.

