

Let's Talk About...

Tummy time

It is common for babies to spend most of time on their backs today because of car seats, bouncers, and swings. It is also recommended to put your baby on their back to sleep to avoid sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

However, babies who spend too much time on their backs do not strengthen the muscles they need to balance and sit. They can also develop a flat head if they spend too much time in one position. Read on for tips on helping your baby practice tummy time.

What is tummy time?

Tummy time is the supervised time babies spend on their stomachs while awake. You can begin tummy time as soon as your baby is born. Simply place your baby on your chest, tummy side down, with their face turned to one side. Make sure you change your baby's head position between right and left each time.

What can happen if your baby doesn't do tummy time?

Babies who don't spend enough time on their tummies could develop either plagiocephaly (PLAY-jee-o-SEF-al-ee) or torticollis (tor-tih-KOHL-iss). Plagiocephaly is a flattening on the back side of the head. Torticollis is a tilting of the head to one side because of tight muscles in one side of the neck.

Benefits of tummy time for my baby?

A baby who spends more time playing on their tummy will usually roll, sit, crawl, pull to stand, and walk earlier than babies who don't. The benefits are:

- Learn better body control
- Learn through sight and touch
- Learn to push with their arms and shift their weight to reach for toys
- Develop better balance while shifting their weight
- Can explore the world

How can I make tummy time easier and fun for my baby?

- Always supervise your baby during tummy time play.
- Get down on the floor and play with your baby face-to-face.
- Place toys on the floor in front of your child, and change the toys often.



- Lie on your back and place your baby on your chest or stomach.
- Avoid placing your baby on bulky blankets that may bunch up, restrict motion or block their airway.
- Using a towel, blanket, or Boppy® pillow under your baby's chest to raise them up a bit will make it easier for your baby to raise and turn their head.
- Place your baby on their tummy after changing a diaper or when you are dressing or drying them after a bath.
- Carrying your baby tummy-side down will encourage your baby to lift their head and legs against gravity.

- Playing with your baby on their tummy for short periods many times a day is better than playing with them for long periods of time a few times a day.
- Hold your baby upright when you cuddle them.
- Limit the time your baby spends in car seats, swings or other items that keep them on their back.

Time spent with your baby should be fun. Try singing or softly talking, and use music, toys, new sounds and different expressions to engage your baby.

Why does my baby fuss when they are on their tummy?

While on their tummy, your baby will want to raise their head to look around. If your baby has not spent much time on their tummy, they may have weak muscles in the neck, back, and shoulders. If your baby has a hard time raising their head, they may get frustrated—especially if they cannot see you. Get down on your baby’s eye level to help them feel more comfortable.

When your baby begins to use their hands during play, they will want to reach for toys while on their tummy. If they have weak muscles, they may not be able to shift their weight enough to reach the toys. This may be frustrating.

Playing on their tummy may make your baby uncomfortable because they are now feeling new sensations. Your baby will see and feel different things than when they are on their back. It may take your baby a while to be comfortable in this new position.

How much tummy time is enough?

Your baby should spend at least 45 minutes a day on their tummy, but that time is spread through the day. Start with 5 minutes at a time, several times a day, and work up to 45 minutes total. You may want to place your baby on their tummy as you rub their

back or talk to them. At other times, you can use a toy made just for tummy time play. When your baby is looking around while lifting their head, they are building strength and skills.

How should I change my baby’s sleep positions?

During the first three months of your baby’s life, the position they sleep in will shape the skull. If your baby develops some flattening on the back side of the head, it is called plagiocephaly. Your baby will prefer to sleep on that flat spot. This could lead to tightness in the neck muscles, called torticollis.

Here are a few tips to help your baby’s skull develop normally:

- Change the position of the head each time your baby goes to sleep so that they don’t sleep on the same side.
- Place visually interesting toys in your baby’s crib so your baby turns to them when awake.
- Change the direction you lay your child in his crib and changing table. One day lay his head at the foot of the crib. The next day, lay your child at the head of the crib. You don’t need to move the crib toys or mobiles; move your baby instead.
- Allow your baby to nap on their tummy while lying on your chest. Change the direction of their head each time.

Who do I call if I have questions?

If you have any questions about tummy time, torticollis, or plagiocephaly, contact your child’s healthcare provider for suggestions and rehabilitation services.

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