

Let's Talk About...

Tummy Time

Babies spend more time on their backs today than they did in the past. There are several reasons why this happens. Car carriers cradle your baby on his back. Many car seats are made to unlatch from a base so you can carry your baby with you, still strapped in the seat. We also commonly use many other devices that cradle baby into these positions, such as vibrating bouncers and swings. Also, doctors caution that you should place your baby on his back for sleep to avoid sudden infant death syndrome.

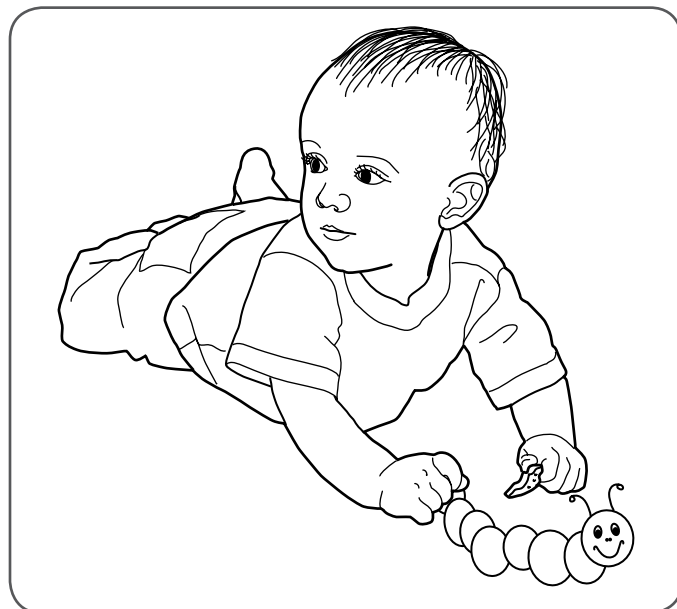
Babies who spend too much time on their backs do not strengthen the muscles they need to learn to balance and walk. A young child's skull is still soft and can become flattened if they spend too much time in one position. Babies need time in many different positions to understand how their bodies work. Spending time on their tummies is a good way for babies to develop all of their muscles. Your child will benefit in many ways if you help him spend time on his tummy. Besides tummy time, you can limit the time your baby spends in devices that hold him on his back and you can hold your baby upright in cuddle time.

What is tummy time?

Tummy time is any time your baby spends on his tummy. It can begin as early as the day he is born. Simply place your baby on your chest, tummy side down with his face turned to one side. Make sure you change his head position, one time facing right, the next time facing left.

Why is tummy time good for my baby?

While on his tummy, your baby will play with movement. While playing with movement, he will receive information that will help him gain control of his body. He will become aware of his body in space. He will learn through sight and touch. He will push



with his arms and eventually shift his weight to reach for toys. He will develop balance while he is shifting his weight. He will use the tummy position as his first means of exploring his world through commando crawling. During tummy time play, he will lengthen the muscles on the front of his body and strengthen the muscles on the back of his body.

A baby who spends more time playing on his tummy will roll, crawl, pull to stand, and walk earlier than babies who don't. Other babies will eventually catch up, but are at risk for side effects. They could develop either plagiocephaly (PLAY-jee-o-SEF-al- ee) or torticollis (tor-tih-KOHL-iss). Plagiocephaly is a flattening of the back of the head. Torticollis is a tilting of the head to one side.

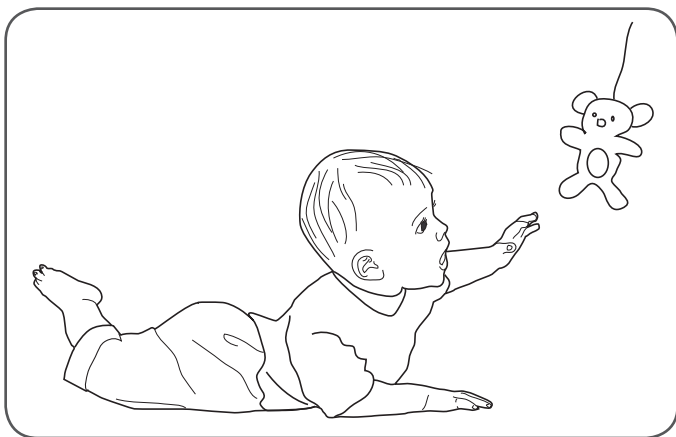
Helping your baby play on his tummy will encourage well-rounded development. Take advantage of tummy time to bond with your baby through play.

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. Change toys often.
- Lie on your back and place your baby on your stomach.
- Avoid placing your baby on bulky blankets that may bunch up and restrict his motion or block his airway.
- Use a rolled towel or blanket or a Boppy® pillow under your baby's chest to raise him up a bit. It will make it easier for him to raise and turn his head.
- Place your baby on his tummy when you are dressing or drying him after a bath.
- Try carrying your baby tummy-side down. This will encourage him to lift his head and legs against gravity.
- Play with your baby on his tummy for short periods several times a day. This is better than playing with him for long periods of time a few times a day.

Time spent with your baby should be fun. Use toys, music, singing, or soft talking to engage your baby.



Why does my baby fuss when he is on his tummy?

While on his tummy, your baby will want to raise his head to look around. If he has not spent much time on his tummy, he may have weak muscles in his neck, back, and shoulders. If your baby has a hard time raising his head, he may get frustrated.

When your baby begins to use his hands during play, he will want to reach for toys while on his tummy. If his muscles are weak, he may not be able to shift his weight enough to reach his toys. This may frustrate him.

Playing on his tummy may make your baby uncomfortable because he is now feeling new sensations. What he sees and feels will be different than when he is on his back. It may take him a while to be comfortable in this new position. Pay attention to your baby's cries, but continue to provide tummy time.

How much tummy time is enough?

Your baby should spend at least 45 minutes a day on their tummy, with that time being 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 his tummy as you rub his back or talk to him. Other times you will want to use a toy made just for tummy time play. Any time your baby is looking around while lifting his head, he is building strength and skills.

What about sleep position?

During the first three months of your baby's life, the position in which he sleeps will shape his skull. If your baby develops some flattening in the back of the head, it is called plagiocephaly. He 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 your baby's head position often as he sleeps on his back. Face his head forward, then to the right and left sides.
- Place visually interesting toys in your baby's crib so he turns to them when he is awake.
- Change the direction you lay your child in his crib. One day lay his head at the foot of the crib. The next day lay him at the head of his crib. You don't need to move the crib toys or mobiles; move your child instead.
- Your baby may also nap on his tummy while on your chest. Take care to change the direction of his head.

Who do I call if I have questions?

- **Primary Children's Rehabilitation Services at Bountiful**

280 North Main Street, 2nd Floor
Bountiful, UT 84010
801.292.8665

- **Primary Children's Rehabilitation Services at Ogden**

3903 Harrison Blvd, 4th Floor
Ogden, UT 84403
801.387.6685

- **Primary Children's Rehabilitation Services at Riverton**

3741 West 12600 South Suite 100
Riverton, Utah 84065
801.571.3081

- **Primary Children's Rehabilitation Services at Taylorsville**

3845 W 4700 South, 2nd Floor
Taylorsville, UT 84118
801.840.4360

- **Pediatric Rehabilitation at Orem Community**

527 W 400 North
Orem, UT 84057
801.714.3505

- **Logan Regional Pediatric Rehabilitation**

550 East 1400 North, Ste W
Logan, UT 84341
435.716.6440

- **Pediatric Rehabilitation at Dixie Regional**

652 S Medical Center Drive
St George, UT 84790
(Located on the lower level of the
Health and Performance Center)
435.251.2250