



Tummy Time Tips and Tools

Interactive and fun activities parents and caregivers can do with their babies to help achieve appropriate developmental milestones.

The following activities will help promote well-shaped heads, and provide many opportunities throughout the day to bond with your baby. These activities will help develop strong neck and trunk muscles as early as baby's first day's home.

Remember!!! It is still very important that infants are placed on their **Backs to Sleep!!** All activities described herein are to be performed with infants that are awake and supervised.

Starting around the same time as the **Back to Sleep Campaign**, infant carriers and a multitude of swings and bouncies became very popular. While these are convenient and sometimes stimulating to infants, the combination of back sleeping at night and daytime pressure on the back of the infant's head often creates flattening on one or both sides of the head. This is called *positional plagiocephaly*. Many newborns already have some flatness and asymmetry of their head and neck. This will increase and progress when baby lays in the same position a majority of the day.

The timing and attainment of appropriate developmental milestones has also been affected by the lack of Tummy Time. Research indicates that babies who spend time on their tummies (prone) actually roll, sit, crawl, and pull to stand earlier than babies who do not.

These suggestions will also increase the cuddle and contact time with your baby and enhance the time you spend together. Teach these suggestions to others who care for your baby so they can become an important part of your baby's day.

Snuggle Time

- Place baby on tummy on safe, firm, clean, flat surface. Hold baby's bottom for some added pressure and shift the weight bearing from upper body. You can also put a rolled towel, receiving blanket, or commercial tummy time device under baby to give them extra support as they try to lift their head and neck. Move head from side to side, helping them get to use to both positions. Place colorful toys out in front of them, or lie down and face them so they can see your face.
- Place baby on your chest as you sit in a small inclined position. Babies often feel more secure if they are on a small incline rather than being totally face down on their bellies. It is easier for your baby to work against gravity in this position. Talk, sing or make faces at your baby in this position. You will be working on many skills with the newborn by doing this. They will calm to your warmth, smell and touch. They will begin to explore and get to know your features. They will even imitate your faces, like sticking your tongue in and out.
- When they are small, adjust baby's position so they can watch you with their head in a midline position (looking straight forward) instead of looking at you while you are off to one side.

Carrying Your Baby

- Carry your baby over your shoulder. Gently support the head in midline (straight forward) position. By changing shoulders often you are encouraging your baby to turn to both sides. Less support is needed as your baby develops strength and head and trunk control.
- Hold your baby out in front of you facing out. Gently support head in the middle. This position will encourage baby to explore environment and look around to increase his visual tracking skills.
- Carry your baby belly down with your arm supporting underneath the chest. Younger babies will still need to have the head, neck and chest supported, but as your baby gains strength and muscle tone, less support is needed. As your baby becomes stronger, you can play "superman" and pretend your baby is flying as you carry him.

- Frequently alternate the arm you hold your baby in so the baby looks and turns to both sides. Also, alternate the hip your baby straddles to encourage looking, turning and balancing in both directions.
- It is important that you are comfortable and confident while carrying your baby. Try your best to alternate the side you carry your baby and the two of you can develop strength together.

Correct Positioning on Infant Equipment

- Stabilize baby's head in their car seats, infant carriers, swings, bouncies and strollers with an approved head support. This is especially important for low birth weight and premature babies, or babies with low muscle tone, so that they don't push their chin to chest, or stay in an off-center head position for too long.
- To increase time spent lying on both sides of head equally, you can alternate the location of the car seat to encourage baby to look out both side of the car. They will typically look to towards the light of the window.
- Place stimulating mobiles and safe crib attached toys to both sides of the crib. Change baby's position in crib every time you place baby to sleep. Example – naptime, baby's head at head of crib; next sleep time baby's head at foot of crib; and so on. Babies will typically look towards the door, so switching their crib position will encourage them to look both ways with their head. This will help to prevent flat spots on their heads.

Feeding Your Baby

- Change the arm the baby is being held in for bottle-fed babies, so that baby begins to look and turn equally to both sides. This will limit the pressure of your arm on the back of baby's head.
- Sit with your back supported and knees bent. Position baby against legs facing you. Feed your baby with their head positioned in the middle.

- Try placing your baby belly down on your lap when burping. When the baby lifts head, align and support it in a midline position as needed. This is a great way to introduce “tummy time” to a young infant.
- Position the high chair for older infants so that the baby has stimulating people and things to look at to both sides.
- Spoon feed your baby in the midline position (looking straight forward) to encourage the bay to develop symmetrical lip and mouth movements.

Diapering Your Baby

- Alternate the position of your baby on the changing table.
- Roll your baby from side to side as you fasten the diaper tabs.
- Roll your baby onto the belly before picking her up. While **SUPERVISED**, allow the baby to play in this position for a few minutes after diaper changes.
- **NEVER** leave infant unsupervised on changing table for any amount of time!!

Dressing and Bathing Your Baby

- Incorporate all of the above lifting, carrying and positioning ideas while you dress and bathe your baby. This will increase the opportunities for tummy time and will turn dressing into a fun activity for both you and baby.
- Towel dry and change your baby while on her belly, and gently roll your baby from side to side as you apply shirt and pants.
- Massage baby on her belly from head to toe after diapering and bathing.

Important Tummy Time Tips

- Give baby as much floor time experience as possible. Babies like to play and engage with toys and people at eye level.
- Whenever possible, limit their time in car seats, bouncies, swings, and strollers.
- Slings, front carriers and backpacks are also available to provide alternatives to rigid carriers and seating systems.
- While awake and **supervised**, lay baby on floor with a towel propping up baby on their side. Place toys out in front and to the sides of them to encourage reaching in all directions.
- Encourage siblings to play on floor with baby while being supervised. Older siblings enjoy the role of helping out and being the “big kid”. They often have more time and can move in and out of positions easier than adults.
- When baby is on the floor or other clean, firm surfaces he will learn to move and figure out how to get in and out of the positions they find most comfortable. Babies need this open space time to explore and get to know their environment and bodies.

More Tummy Time Activities

- Lie on the floor and face the baby on your tummy. Help your baby push up on his elbows to lift his head and look at you. You can also provide support under his chest to make lifting the head in midline position easier. This is great for siblings, too!
- Place brightly colored toys, mirrors, or pictures of family members in front of the baby to encourage reaching and playing with both hands and arms. Your baby may begin propping up by himself and moving around the floor on his belly. Baby may even start to crawl while in this position.
- Roll your baby to both sides by extending the arm closest to the ground up and over head. This will teach baby the moves to be successful in rolling by himself.

- Older babies enjoy playing “superman” or “airplane” with a caregiver. Lift baby up from under their arms and move them in space up and down. This will give baby a chance to lift head, neck and increase trunk strength and stability. Babies also learn about movement and awareness of themselves in space.
- Lay down with your legs bent in a sit up position. Place baby on your bent legs and move up and down. Older babies really enjoy this activity. This activity will develop full body strength.

It is important to remember to change, modify and adapt activities to meet your baby’s needs. Some babies will progress to skills sooner or later than others. Not all babies will have tightness in their necks, or they may have heads that are not well shaped, but these activities can promote normal development for all babies.