

Tummy Time

A Parent's Guide About the Importance of Tummy Time



Tummy time helps to make sure your baby gets enough time on his tummy each day.

This is done through activities such as handling, carrying, diapering, positioning, feeding and playing with your baby. All of these should take place while your baby is awake and supervised. Having your baby spend time on his tummy is a good thing.

It helps:

- Develop the muscles in his neck and shoulders
- Prevent tight neck muscles and the development of flat areas on the back of your baby's head
- Build the muscles your baby needs to roll, sit and crawl

Tummy time is:

- Any activity that keeps your baby from lying flat in one position against a hard, supporting surface
- Anytime you carry, position, or play with your baby while he is on his belly

Tummy time can:

- Help babies of all ages
- Be fun and a great bonding experience
- Be easy or challenging for your baby
- Change as your baby grows and gets stronger

Why do babies need tummy time?

Babies need tummy time because they spend a lot of time on their backs. This is because:

- Most parents put their babies on their backs while they sleep. It is important that your baby be put on his back to sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics says this helps prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- A lot of parents use baby carriers that double as car seats and carriers.
- This combination of sleeping on the back at night and having pressure on your baby's head during the day can cause a flattening of the skull.
- These flat areas develop on the back of the head and on the forehead. This is called plagiocephaly.
- This flattening may be made worse by a condition called torticollis. This is when there is a single muscle or group of muscles that are tight or weak on one side of the neck. This causes your baby's head to tilt or prefer to turn to one side. The muscle fibers can shorten when your baby rests in one position for long periods of time.

Always stay with your baby during his tummy time. Do not leave him alone on his tummy. It is important to your baby's development that he gets supervised tummy time and is put in different positions during the day.



Carrying

1. Take turns with the hip your baby straddles. This way he can look, turn and balance to the right and left in both directions.
2. Carry your baby over your shoulder. Gently support his head in a centered position. Changing the shoulder your baby is carried on helps him turn to both sides. Less support is needed as your baby gets stronger and can control his head and trunk.
3. Hold your baby out in front and facing away from you. Gently keep his head centered. This helps him watch what's going on in the room by turning his head.

Positions for Play

1. A great way to have tummy time with your baby is to lie on your back and hold your baby on your chest facing you. This helps your baby to lift his head to look at you. Gently turn your baby's head to both sides. Less support is needed as your baby grows. Your baby will begin to keep his head centered and push up on his arms.
2. Put a pillow, small towel or blanket under your baby's chest. This helps him lift and center his head.
3. Play with your baby on the floor. Put toys on both sides of him to get him to turn his head and reach with both hands. Playing with your baby helps him to be more comfortable around other people.
4. Put your baby over your lap. Raise one of your legs higher to make it easier for him to lift his head.
5. Sit on the floor with your baby. Play with toys centered in the middle, then to each side.





Feeding

1. Change the arm you hold your baby in for feeding. This way your baby gets to look and turn to both sides. This also limits the pressure of your arm on the back of your baby's head. Feed your baby in one arm, then switch to the other side for the next feeding. This will help him develop neck flexibility on both sides.
2. Sit with your back supported and knees bent. Keep your baby against your legs, facing you. Keep your baby's head centered while feeding him.
3. Try putting your baby belly down over your lap when burping him.
4. Put your baby's seat in a place where he can turn and look to both sides. Feed your baby with the spoon coming in from the middle, left and right to help him turn his head to both sides. This also lets him use the small muscles around his lips and mouth so they get stronger.

Sleeping

1. Put your baby on his back to sleep. He should be at the opposite end of the crib every other night. Keep a calendar by the crib to remind you to change your baby's direction.
2. Turn your baby's head to the opposite side each night to keep it from getting flat spots.

Other ways to help with head shape:

Some babies may have flattening or asymmetry to their heads even after things like tummy time. If your baby's head shape does not get better after he is 4 months old, your pediatrician may send your child to:

- A doctor who specializes in the skull.
- A professional called an orthotist who can make a special helmet to help shape your baby's head. This helmet is called a cranial remolding orthosis. Your baby wears it 24 hours a day. It gently helps your baby's head have a more normal shape.



Speak with your pediatrician today to find out if tummy time is enough to maintain a proper head shape for your child.

To schedule an appointment or for more information, visit [childrens.com/plastics](https://www.childrens.com/plastics) or call **1-844-4CHILDRENS**.

