

Tummy Time!



TUMMY TIME is an important activity for your baby's development and is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Because the AAP recommends that babies sleep on their backs for safety reasons, babies need enough supervised Tummy Time during the hours they are awake to strengthen head, neck, and upper body muscles. Tummy Time helps to build the strength and coordination needed for rolling over, crawling, reaching, and playing. Remember that all babies benefit from Tummy Time, including newborns.

Pediatric occupational therapy practitioners promote a child's development through activities such as Tummy Time, and they can help make Tummy Time a regular part of your daily routine. The following tips are from occupational therapy practitioners working with babies on Tummy Time.

Precautions:

- Consult with your health care provider first.
- Always supervise your baby.
- Make sure your baby is alert and awake.
- Place your baby on a safe and firm surface.

If you want to:

Make Tummy Time part of your family's daily routine.



Increase your baby's ability to reach and play.



Photo courtesy of Anne Zachry.

Consider these activity tips:

- Begin with 3 to 5 minutes per session, working up to a total of 40 to 60 minutes daily. Tummy Time can be done in short sessions throughout the day, based on your baby's tolerance and needs.
- Pay attention to signs that your baby is getting tired, such as crying or resting his face on the surface, and be sure to end Tummy Time before your baby becomes fatigued.
- Incorporate Tummy Time into the activities you're already doing with your baby, such as towel drying after bath time, changing diapers, or applying lotion.
- When burping your baby, try laying her across your lap on her tummy.
- It is never too early to begin to read to your baby, and Tummy Time is a great opportunity for storytelling.
- While your baby is playing on his belly, hold a toy in front of his face to get his attention. This will encourage your baby to lift his head and reach. Sit or lie down in front of your baby during Tummy Time for safety and supervision.
- During Tummy Time, arrange toys in a circle around your baby to promote reaching in many different directions.
- Initiate eye contact and talk, coo, or sing to your baby while she is on her belly, because this will attract your baby's interest and motivate her to participate.
- Your baby will be encouraged to lift her head, reach, and play when she sees your face and hears your voice. Get your whole family involved.

If you want to:

Position your baby to enjoy Tummy Time.



Photo courtesy of Anne Zachry.

Engage your baby's senses.



Photo courtesy of Anne Zachry.

Consider alternatives to "typical" Tummy Time.



Photo courtesy of Christa Pumerantz.

Consider these activity tips:

- Roll up a thin towel or blanket to make a bolster that will provide extra support during Tummy Time. Place the bolster under your baby's chest, and position his arms over the roll, with his hands stretching out in front of it. Your baby's chin should always be positioned in front of the bolster so that the airway is not blocked.
- Always supervise your baby during bolstering.
- Be sure your baby distributes his weight evenly on both sides of his body while on his tummy to strengthen muscles equally.
- Limit the time your baby is constrained in swings, exersaucers, and other baby gear, and encourage active play to strengthen his muscles through Tummy Time.

- Place a plastic mirror in front of your baby so she will be interested in lifting her head to look at her own reflection.
- Use blankets or towels with different textures and colors so your baby can experience different visual and touch sensations (e.g., switching between a terry-cloth towel and a fleece blanket).

Positions for Caregiver:

- A great way to carry out Tummy Time is to place your baby on your stomach or chest while you are awake and in a reclined position on a chair, bed, or floor. This is also a great way to begin Tummy Time with a newborn.

Positions for Baby:

- Side-lying is another positioning option. Position your baby on a blanket on his side, and support his back with your hand or use a small rolled up blanket. Make sure both of your baby's arms are in front of him, and slightly bend his hips and knees so your baby is comfortable. This position can also aid in reaching and playing.

Need More Information?

Pediatric occupational therapy practitioners promote the participation of all children and their families in everyday activities (or *occupations*), including Tummy Time, to facilitate development. When there is a particular area of concern, the occupational therapist can create an individualized strategy based on the child's and family's specific needs.

Occupational therapy practitioners work with children in their homes, at school, in private practice, at children's hospitals, and in other community locations, providing interventions that are individualized, appropriate, and effective. Ask your pediatrician for a recommendation, or look online to find an occupational therapist in your area. You can find additional information through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

Developed by Christa Pumerantz for the American Occupational Therapy Association.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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