

The Importance of Tummy Time.

Tummy time is the amount of time babies spend lying on their stomachs. Since the early 1990's health authorities have strongly recommended that babies sleep on their backs to reduce the incidence of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). This successful campaign has reduced the incidence by 40%. At the same time authorities stressed that babies needed to spend time on their stomachs. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) campaign was called "back to sleep, tummy to play". Unfortunately the "tummy to play" part has tended to be forgotten. There is renewed focus on "**tummy to play**".

Infants should be holding up their heads and pushing up on their arms by the end of three months.



Why do babies need tummy time?

Tummy time promotes muscle development in the neck and shoulders, helps prevent tight neck muscles and the development of flat areas on the back of babies heads. It helps develop the muscles needed for lifting their heads, rolling over, sitting up, balancing, crawling and walking. In addition, tummy time is said to aid development of sensory-perceptual, social-emotional, problem-solving, visual and hearing abilities in babies. In a recent study by the American Physical Therapist Association and cited by the AAP, two-thirds of 400 respondents said that they had seen a delay in motor skill development of babies during the past six years. Those surveyed cited the lack of tummy time as the main reason. Infants now miss out on the 12 hours of tummy time they used to get when sleeping on their tummies.

With the combination of back sleeping, back playing and spending excessive amounts of time in infant carriers that double as car seats, the backs of baby's skulls can flatten. This flattening is often made worse by torticollis. Torticollis is where neck muscles are tight or weak on one side causing the baby to tilt or turn to one side.

How much tummy time should a baby have?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, tummy time should begin on the first day home from hospital. Play and interact with your baby when he is awake and on his tummy 2 or 3 times each day for a short period, increasing the amount of time as the baby enjoys it more. A great time to do this is after changing nappies or when the baby wakes

from a sleep. At first, some babies resist, but persevere. Eventually your baby will love tummy time. **It is never too late to start.**

Ways to do tummy time

- Place yourself or a toy just out of the baby's reach during play time, talk to him and get him to turn or reach for you or the toy
- As the baby gets older, place toys in a circle around the baby. Reaching to different points in the circle will allow him to develop the appropriate muscles to roll over, scoot on his tummy and crawl.
- Lie on your back and place the baby on your chest. The baby will lift his head and use his arms to try and see your face.
- While being watched by an adult, have a young child play with the baby while on his tummy. Young children can get down on the floor easily. It is fun for both the baby and the child.



. You can download further information and tips from

- California Childcare Health Program (2009) *Tummy Time for Infants*, www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/healthandsafety/tummy-tim-0209.pdf.
- Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (2007): *Tummy Time Tools, Activities to Help you Position, Carry, Hold and Play with Your Baby*. www.choa.org.
- NHS Scotland (2007), *Protect your baby's natural head shape: tummy time to play, back to sleep* www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/doc/170857/0047857.pdf
- American Academy of Pediatrics and Healthy Child Care America (2003), *Back to Sleep, Tummy to Play*, www.healthychildcare.org.



References

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www.choa.org.

www.devdelay.org/newsletter/articles/html/273-tummy-time-and-crawling.html.

www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/doc/170857/004857.pdf.

