

Tummy Time – Top Tips

By Dr. Lin Day (www.babysensory.com)

Tummy time is an essential aspect of development from birth. It promotes:

- Healthy development of the central nervous system and brain.
- Strong neck, back and upper body muscles.
- Balance, coordination, stability and postural skills.
- Flat hand development, which increases precision finger and thumb movements.
- Rolling over.
- Visual development.
- Crawling - an essential developmental milestone not to be missed.



If your baby finds being on his tummy physically uncomfortable, introduce tummy time gradually, two or three times a day for a few minutes. It will eventually become part of your baby's daily routine and he will learn, play and practice essential head control movements in this position. Make sure that your baby is safe and attended.

How to make tummy time fun:

1. Keep your baby company on the floor. Coo, sing or make funny sounds to encourage him to lift up his head.
2. Roll up a towel and place it under your baby's chest. Extend your baby's arms forwards. This supported position allows your baby to lift up his head and look around, which improves focusing ability and strengthens neck muscles.
3. Place your baby on his back. Slowly pull your baby up to a sitting position (hold your baby under his arms), and then ease him back down again.
4. Place a safety mirror, or favourite toy, in front of your baby and call his attention to it. This will encourage your baby to lift up his head to get a better look.
5. Shake a rattle or bell to one side of your baby to encourage him to turn towards the sound.
6. Encourage creeping movements by placing interesting toys out of reach.
7. Lie on your back and put your baby on your bare tummy or chest. Say your baby's name to encourage him to raise his head to get a better look at you.
8. Place your baby on his tummy across one arm. Your baby's head will rest in the crook of your arm, but his legs will dangle free. Rock your baby in this position.

9. Place baby across your legs and pat his back. This will encourage your baby to lift up his head and straighten his legs.
10. Place baby on your lap facing your knees. Draw up your knees so that he can see what's going on. He will probably love the new view.
11. Put your baby on edge of the bed and sit on the floor with your face next to his. From this position, you can interact and play together.
12. Put your baby on his tummy over a beach or gym ball and hold him firmly while you gently rock the ball back and forth. Your baby will learn to shift his body weight, which improves balance and co-ordination.
13. Roll a ball over your baby's back, legs and arms. It's a great way to stimulate his skin and relieve tension.
14. Place a ball in front of your baby and within easy reach. As soon as he touches the ball, it will roll away. Your baby will either 'swim' or on his tummy or lift himself up on his forearms in an attempt to reach it.
15. Exercise or massage your baby after a bath while he lies on his tummy.
16. In the sitting position (lateral propping may be necessary if your baby is learning to sit up), place an interesting toy in front of your baby. He may end up on his tummy when he tries to grab it.
17. Avoid putting your baby in a recliner or restraining device. Your baby needs to be able to move and coordinate his movements without restriction.
18. Spending time with your baby and giving plenty of praise and encouragement will soon make tummy time a pleasurable habit.

Tummy time is an essential aspect of development because it leads on to crawling. Crawling fires groups of neurons (brain cells) in different parts of the cortex responsible for visual processing, sensory perception, conscious planning and prediction. It also activates eye-teaming, a crucial skill in learning to read.

Crawling is a key period in your baby's physical and intellectual development and it only takes a few minutes of daily tummy time to start seeing results.

Babies who spend most of their waking hours on their backs may experience delays in developmental milestones. If you have any concerns about your baby's development, see your GP.