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Healthcare of Atlanta  
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# Tummy Time Tools

## Activities to help you position, carry, hold and play with your baby

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Tummy Time Tools helps you 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.

### Why do babies need tummy time?

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

- As recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, most parents put their babies on their backs while they sleep.
- 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 turn to one side. The muscle fibers can shorten when your baby rests in one position for long periods of time.

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).

It is also important to your baby's development that he get supervised tummy time and be put in different positions during the day.

### Tummy time is:

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

### Tummy time can:

- Help babies of all ages.
- Be fun.
- Be easy or challenging for your baby.
- Change as your baby grows and gets stronger.
- Be a great time to bond with your baby.

Always stay with your baby during his tummy time. Do not leave him alone on his tummy.

## 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 to 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.
- 4 Carry your baby belly down. Make sure one of your arms is under his chest for support. Younger babies need their head and chest supported. Less support is needed as your baby gains strength in his neck and trunk muscles.
- 5 As your baby gets stronger, you can play airplane and pretend he is flying as you carry and support him.
- 6 Hold and carry your baby facing away from you. This helps him watch what's going on in the room by turning his head.
- 7 Carry your baby facing away from you on his right side. Switch and carry your baby on his left side.



## Snuggle time

Lay your baby against your shoulder facing you or gently swaddled in your arms. This is snuggle time. This helps your baby to lift his head to look at you. Support and center his head, and turn it gently both ways.



## 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 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.



## Dressing and bathing

Use the lifting, carrying and positioning activities while you dress and bathe your baby. This gives your baby more tummy time. It also adds a little fun.

- 1 Towel dry and change your baby on his belly. Gently roll him from side to side as you put on his clothes.
- 2 Massage your baby from head to toe after diapering and bathing.





## Positioning

- 1 Change the way your baby can watch you. Make sure his head is centered instead of off to one side. Put your baby in your lap facing you. Sing, make eye contact, snuggle and center his head, as needed. Challenge your baby's balance to both sides by tipping his body slightly to each side. Your baby will recenter his body and gain strength.
- 2 If your car seat comes with a curved head support, center your baby's head in it. If your car seat does not have a curved head support, the American Academy of Pediatrics says to use a rolled blanket or towel. This can be put along the side of your baby's head and shoulders while he is in the car seat. This keeps your baby from leaning to one side and helps keep his head and body in the middle. Do not put pads or cushions under or behind your baby while he is in the car seat and riding in a vehicle. Be sure to remove any added positioning supports under or behind the child before driving. You can buy additional head supports only intended for use in baby carriers, swings and strollers. Do not use these added supports in car seats while the child is riding in a vehicle.
- 3 Put fun and interesting mobiles or toys on both sides of your baby. This gets him to turn in both directions while on his tummy or back. Change the side your baby lies on, even if he likes one side more than the other.



## Diapering

- 1 Always put your baby in a different position on the changing table. Roll your baby from side to side as you fasten the diaper tabs. Talk to your baby from different sides as you change his diaper.
- 2 Change your baby's diaper on the bed or floor with your baby facing you. This helps him keep his head centered and make eye contact with you.
- 3 After diaper changes, roll your baby on his belly before picking him up. While supervised, let your baby play in this position for a few minutes.



## 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 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.



## 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.



Back to sleep,  
tummy to play





## More activities

- 1 Sit your baby on your lap, facing you. Give support as needed. Help your baby hold his head up and centered. Turn his head equally to both sides. This is a good position for feeding.
- 2 Lie on the floor with your baby. Make sure you are face to face. Help your baby push up on his elbows to lift his head to look at you.
- 3 Make sure you support your baby under his chest. This makes lifting his head in the middle easier.
- 4 Put toys in front of your baby while he is lying on his belly. This helps him reach and play with both hands. Your baby may prop up on both arms and move around the floor on his belly. He may also crawl from this position.
- 5 While watching TV or visiting with friends, put your baby on his tummy over your lap. Change your baby's position to help him look to both sides.



## Other ways to help with head shape



Some babies may have flattening or asymmetry to their heads even after a program as active as 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 23 hours a day. It gently helps your baby's head have a more normal shape.

## Making the program right for you

The Tummy Time Tools activities can be changed to meet your baby's needs. Some babies will learn skills sooner or later than others. Not all babies have tightness in their necks. Many have well-shaped heads. The tummy time activities can help with normal development for all babies. The time you spend on these activities will help bring you and your baby closer.

Some babies will need more exercises to stretch and strengthen tight or weak muscles because of torticollis. You may get these from your baby's doctor or occupational or physical therapist.

Have a wonderful time using the activities in Tummy Time Tools to help your baby grow strong.

Call your child's pediatrician or Children's Healthcare of Atlanta for more information.

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[choa.org/tummytime](http://choa.org/tummytime)



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*This is general information and not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.*

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