

## Tummy Time!



**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.

### If you want to:

### Consider these activity tips:

#### Help your baby get used to Tummy Time.



- Begin with short intervals, such as 2 to 3 minutes a day, and work up to at least 20 minutes per day. Daily Tummy Time can be done in short increments or all in one session, depending upon your baby's tolerance and needs.
- Try Tummy Time soon after your baby wakes up and is alert. When your baby is well rested, she may be able to tolerate this activity longer.
- 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.
- Monitor the time of day, duration, and reaction to each Tummy Time experience to track your baby's progress.

#### Precautions:

- Consult with your healthcare provider before beginning a Tummy Time program.
- Make sure your baby is alert and awake before participating in this activity.
- Always supervise your baby during Tummy Time.
- Be sure to place your baby on a safe and firm surface during Tummy Time.

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



- 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 story-telling.

## If you want to:

### Increase your baby's ability to reach and play.



## Consider these activity tips:

- 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.
- Use toys that are colorful or that make noises to increase your baby's interest.

### Improve your bond with your baby and get the whole family to participate in Tummy Time.



Photo courtesy of Anne Zachry.

- 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.
- Offer a variety of faces and voices of family members, which are appealing to your baby and will encourage her to lift her head, reach, and play.

### Position your baby to enjoy Tummy Time.



Photo courtesy of Anne Zachry.

- 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.

### Engage your baby's senses.



Photo courtesy of Anne Zachry.

- Place a plastic mirror in front of your baby so she will be interested in lifting her head to look at her own reflection.
- Lay your baby on a colorful blanket or towel for visual interest.
- Use blankets or towels with different textures so your baby can experience different touch sensations (e.g., switching between a terry-cloth towel and a fleece blanket).
- Consider the surface upon which your baby is lying, such as carpet or tile. Alternate between different surfaces and note whether your baby's tolerance increases with particular sensations.

If you want to:

Consider these activity tips:

**Consider alternatives to “typical” Tummy Time.**



Photo courtesy of Christa Pumerantz.

**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.
- Carefully hold your baby in your arms on his belly, as if he is an “airplane.” Your baby may be so interested in this new perspective that he may not even realize he is on his belly.

**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 therapy practitioner can create an individualized strategy based on the child and family-specific and 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 or school administrator 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](http://www.aota.org).

*Developed in 2013 and revised in 2018 by Christa Pumerantz, OTR/L and Anne Zachry, PhD, OTR for the American Occupational Therapy Association.*

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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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