

# FINfacts



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## Tummy Time: More Than Just Tickling

**I** remember when my oldest daughter first discovered tummy time. Around three months old, I lay with her on a blanket, scattered a few toys down and watched her discover a whole new point of view. Her eyes focused in on her favorite bear rattle, her head bobbing, fascinated with the new angle.

Tummy time has many benefits for infants. Not all infants are as receptive to tummy time as my daughter was, however. So how do we go about helping our infants make the adjustment to this new – and beneficial – perspective?

Beth Brown of Pike Community Hospital suggests beginning by sitting in a partially reclined chair and lying an infant on your chest with his chest. This works by building the infant's stamina through chest-to-chest contact. She suggests having daily time on a blanket on the floor with our infant.

As a physical therapist who specializes in working with pediatric patients, Brown can speak to the benefits of this change in position and has seen the effects lack of tummy time can have on infants.

"Tummy time allows a child to strengthen and lengthen the head, shoulder and back muscles. It's a way to encourage appropriate developmental milestones and encourage later stage infants to crawl or scoot," Brown said.

Indeed, lack of tummy time can impact developmental milestones such as head lifting, turning over, sitting and crawling. According to the Pathways

Awareness Medical Round Table, *United Press International*, about one in 40 babies is diagnosed with early motor delay, which can range from low muscle tone to cerebral palsy. Some early motor delays are present at birth and others develop or are made worse by lack of stomach time.

Tummy time also creates variation in visual and tactile, or touch, experiences and can help promote best possible head shape. The skulls of newborns are soft and pliable, enabling them to be flexible enough to pass through the birth canal. Their skulls do not fuse until around the second birthday; therefore, infants' heads are susceptible to flat spots when they are laid in one position often. Brown says, "In the last 10 years or so, I've seen so many more kids with flattened areas or kids who keep their heads to one side, especially with first-time parents because they've been told to make their child sleep on their backs. A lot of times children can't reach some of their developmental milestones because of all the time they spend on their backs."

With so many different options of infant carriers, it's easy to forget the importance of tummy time. Infants spend time in car seats, swings, bouncy seats, pop-up cribs and strollers. In all of these, however, a child is still on his back.

Brown suggests "if there is a concern about head flattening by the parents, they should discuss it with their pediatrician or physician and possibly get a referral to a pediatric physical therapist. We can help parents find other

positions to help the child develop as they should." You can also talk with your Help Me Grow Service Coordinator who can share ideas for working with your baby.

What about the child with special needs or the baby with colic?

Brown says, "The first thing is to check with your doctor to make sure tummy time is okay. If it is, you sometimes have to use your ingenuity and creativity. There are ways to help your child adjust and work around the issues."

This issue of *FINfacts* is all about tummy time, with tips and references for helping your babies have fun on their tummies!

## Resources

**A**ny online store, from Target to e-bay, will give good ideas for the best toys for tummy time. But sometimes the best tummy time activities don't involve spending money on toys at all. Getting down on the floor with your baby not only encourages tummy time and, therefore, muscle development; it also encourages bonding and social development – which are priceless.

Here are additional resources for tummy time development:

### Pathways Awareness

1-800-955-CHILD (2445)

[www.pathwaysawareness.org](http://www.pathwaysawareness.org)

**P**athways Awareness is a national non-profit organization dedicated

to raising awareness about the benefit of early detection and early therapy for children with early motor delays. Our website, designed for both parents and professionals, contains valuable information about children's physical development and crucial infant milestones. Pathways Awareness Foundation is uniquely dedicated to increasing knowledge about the gift of early detection and the benefit of early therapy for infants and children with early motor delays. We honor and support their parents by providing knowledge, information, and a sense of community as they guide their children on life's journey.

#### WEB-ONLY RESOURCES

General tummy tips:

[http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/Tummy\\_Time.cfm?](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/Tummy_Time.cfm?)

How lack of tummy time impacts growth: [http://www.babycenter.com/204\\_lack-of-tummy-time-hinders-baby-development\\_5234005.bc](http://www.babycenter.com/204_lack-of-tummy-time-hinders-baby-development_5234005.bc)

Helping your baby get comfortable on his back: [http://www.babycenter.com/0\\_tummy-time-how-to-help-your-baby-get-comfortable-on-his-bell\\_1439985.bc](http://www.babycenter.com/0_tummy-time-how-to-help-your-baby-get-comfortable-on-his-bell_1439985.bc)

### Plagiocephaly & Torticollis

**P**assage through the birth canal often makes a newborn's head appear pointy or elongated for a short time. It's normal for a baby's skull, which is made up of several separate bones that will eventually fuse together, to be slightly misshapen during the few days or weeks after birth.

But if your baby is developing a persistent flat spot, either in the back or on one side of the head, it could be a sign of positional plagiocephaly, also

known as flattened head syndrome. This can occur when a baby sleeps in the same position repeatedly, spends a lot of time lying on his back or being in a position where the head is resting against a flat surface (such as in cribs, strollers, swings, and playpens), or because of problems with the neck muscles.

Fortunately, positional plagiocephaly is usually easy to treat, and with appropriate intervention will correct itself by the time a child is one year old.

Because infants' heads are soft to allow for the incredible brain growth that occurs in the first year of life, they're susceptible to being "molded" into a flat shape. A baby might even start to develop positional plagiocephaly before birth, if pressure is placed on the baby's skull by the mother's pelvis or a twin. In fact, it's not at all unusual to see plagiocephaly in multiple birth infants.

The number of positional plagiocephaly cases increased six fold from 1992 to 1994, occurring in approximately 33 out of every 10,000 births. This dramatic increase started when the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) began its "Back to Sleep" campaign, which continues to recommend that babies sleep on their backs to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Since the AAP's campaign, the incidence of SIDS in the United States has decreased by almost 40% while the incidence of flattened head syndrome has risen. Still, the prevention of SIDS is worth the increased risk of a flattened head, especially because positional plagiocephaly will often correct itself with appropriate intervention.

Another thing that can contribute to flattening is torticollis, which means the neck muscles are too tight, have inadequate tone, or are shorter on one side

than the other, causing the head to tilt one way while the chin points in the opposite direction.

Premature babies are more prone to positional plagiocephaly - their skulls are softer than those of full-term babies, and they spend a great deal of time on their backs without being moved or picked up because of their medical needs and extreme fragility after birth, which usually requires a stay in the neonatal intensive care unit.

#### Signs and Symptoms...

Positional plagiocephaly is usually easy for parents to notice. Typically, the back of the child's head (called the occiput) and the ear on the flattened side may be pushed forward. In severe cases, there may be bulging on the side opposite from the flattening and the forehead may be asymmetrical (or uneven), although this is unusual in full-term infants. If torticollis is the cause, the neck, jaw, and face may be asymmetrical.

Always be sure your baby gets plenty of supervised time on his stomach while awake during the day. Not only does "tummy time" promote normal shaping of the back the head, it also helps in other ways. Babies learn to push up on their arms, which develops the muscles needed for crawling and sitting up. It also strengthens the neck muscles.

If torticollis is the cause of your baby's flattened head, a course of physical therapy and a home exercise program will help. You will learn exercises to do with your baby involving stretching techniques. Most moves will consist of stretching your child's neck to the side opposite the tilt. Eventually, the neck muscles will be elongated and the neck will straighten itself out.

Article adapted from Kids Health

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/sleep/positional\\_plagiocephaly.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/sleep/positional_plagiocephaly.html)

## Tummy Time Happens in Very Different Ways

**A**lmost from birth, Rylee Lehr preferred tummy time. “I really worried about putting him to sleep because he wouldn’t sleep on his back at all,” says Summer Preston, mother of Rylee who is now 19 months old. The family provided Rylee lots of tummy time with toys, like a mat with water in it and floating animals and a blow up frog with fish in it. Mobiles and activity gyms for back play just wouldn’t do for Rylee.



Rylee Carter Lehr

By ten months, Rylee was walking and mom attributes this to Rylee’s early tummy activities. “Tummy time is important because it helps a baby’s arm and chest development,” says Summer.

Dana Chestnut, mother of two boys, Dylan, 5 months, and P.J., 4 years has a very different experience.

P.J. enjoyed tummy time as an infant and he was sitting at six months. Dylan, however, didn’t like tummy time at all. Dana says of Dylan, “I’d get down on the floor in front of him and call his name or put a toy just out of reach so he’d have to reach for it, but he didn’t like tummy time. We had to really encourage him.”

She admits Dylan did have reflux, which could have contributed to his resistance with playing on his belly. “We had to be careful about putting him on his tummy too soon after eating.”

Dana works for



Dana, PJ and Dylan

Ross County Help Me Grow and her children went to Pickaway County Help Me Grow. When asked about advice for parents struggling with getting their tiny one

to accept tummy time, Dana says, “just keep trying, even if they don’t like it,” stressing



how important tummy activities are to an infant’s development. She suggests getting down on the floor with them, keeping their attention by calling their name and interacting with them.

When the “Back to Sleep” campaign was launched in 1992, families became educated about the importance of putting their infants to sleep on their backs. This

led to a striking decrease in the number of deaths from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Currently, we see that the pendulum may have swung too far. Parents are

fearful of putting their babies on their stomachs at all, for fear of suffocation. Certain developmental delays have occurred, according to the American Physical Therapy Association, from babies who do not get “tummy time” and who may also spend long periods of time in their infant carriers.

Too much time in car seats, carriers, and bouncy seats can lead to misshapen heads. Infants’ skulls are soft and made up of several skull plates. These plates can move and have space between them, called ‘sutures’ which allow room for the brain to grow. If the head is left in the same position for long periods, the plates move in such a way that flat spots are left.

Babies can develop tight neck muscles or neck muscle imbalance. This condition is known as torticollis. Babies need time on their stomachs to build strong muscles in their neck, back, and shoulders. Babies need this strength in order to proceed to rolling, sitting, and crawling.

Be sure to put your baby on his tummy when he is awake. Encourage your baby to find and follow your face or a toy with his eyes looking up. Another way to gain additional tummy time is in the football hold, with your baby’s tummy facing down on your forearm. This encourages baby to raise his head to look up. For further ideas about tummy time activities, “Tummy Time Tools” is available at [www.apta.org/consumer](http://www.apta.org/consumer).

Sources:

“Lack of Tummy Time may Slow Infant Development”, 8/14/08. Retrieved from [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/fullstory\\_68140.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/fullstory_68140.html), 8/25/08. “Positional Plagiocephaly”, 3/20/07. Retrieved from [http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/positional\\_plagiocephaly.cfm](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/positional_plagiocephaly.cfm), 8/25/08.

## Help your baby get comfortable on his belly.

**T**he experience of being on their tummy helps babies learn to push up, roll over, sit up, crawl, and pull to a stand," explains Danette Glassy, a pediatrician in Mercer Island, Washington, and chairperson of the American Academy of Pediatrics' committee on early education and childcare.

So if your baby seems miserable in that position, it's no wonder. Not only is it unfamiliar, it's physically uncomfortable. It's hard work for your baby to keep his head up when he's on his tummy, and he can't see much of anything down there. He may even feel abandoned. Here are some strategies for helping your baby feel at home on his tummy, along with products that can help.

### Keep your baby company

One mom-tested strategy is to distract your baby from the unfamiliar feeling of being face-down until he gets used to it. The best thing you can do, says Glassy, is join your baby on the floor. Encourage him, talk with him, shake his rattle, make funny faces, play peek-a-boo. He might even enjoy watching you do your leg lifts or crunches (*he's working hard after all*). Another option is to lay your baby tummy-down on *your* tummy, either on the floor, in a recliner, or even in the bath. Once your baby has sufficient head control — around age 4 months — you can play airplane: Lie on the floor and bend your legs. Put your baby's tummy against your legs, his head at your knees. Then bend your legs while holding on to him firmly. He'll probably love the new view. You might also put him on the bed, near the edge, and sit on the floor with your face next to his. He might appreciate the softer surface, and

you can easily interact with him in this position.

**Tip:** Make sure your child's sitter or daycare provider knows about the importance of tummy time when your baby's awake as well as the importance of placing your baby on his back to sleep.

### Provide entertainment

Prop a board book open in front of your baby, or place a favorite toy within reach. Invest in a tummy-time toy or gym, designed especially for babies to play with while on their belly. Some have lights, mirrors, moving pictures, music and/or squeaky toys attached. Or place him on a colorful quilt or an activity mat designed just for babies. Some mats have prop-up toys or mirrors, and others are filled with water, for added fun. Take your baby's socks off so he can get good traction on the mat.

**Tip:** Have your baby's sibling(s) play nearby when he's on his tummy. (You may want to use a play yard so he won't get stepped on.) Watching a brother or sister — or even a family pet — may just keep him happily distracted for a bit.

### Prop your baby up

Some parents find that giving their baby a new perspective — by propping him on a rolled towel or nursing pillow, for example — makes all the difference. If your child has some neck strength and head control (by age 3 or 4 months) but can't get up on his forearms, simply place the towel or pillow under his chest and armpits, with his arms in front of it. (If he tends to roll forward, keep your hand on his bottom.) When he can get up on his forearms independently, remove the pillow and let him work on his motor skills without it.

**Tip:** Some babies enjoy rolling on a big

exercise ball. Hold him on it tummy-down while you gently rock the ball back and forth.

### Time it right

Make sure your baby isn't hungry or tired when you set him tummy-down. On the other hand, don't place him on a full belly, which might be uncomfortable. When he starts to cry — even if it's only been a minute — try to coax him a bit longer by talking with him or playing with him. When he's had enough, pick him up and try again later. His tolerance for tummy time is likely to increase gradually with experience and a bit of coaxing. And many babies are more content on their tummy once they can roll over and it becomes a matter of choice.

**Tip:** Some parents find it helpful to roll their babies over on their tummy for a little while after every diaper change. It's easy to remember to do it, and your baby may come to expect it. Your baby may also enjoy the view, if he's up on a changing table. Just be sure to hold on to him so he doesn't roll off.

### Tune in to your baby

Try to figure out if there's anything in particular about tummy time that your baby finds distressing. Maybe his blankie gets too scrunched under him for comfort (and that shag carpet is downright scary). Maybe it's too cold on the floor, or too slippery. One mom found that her baby liked tummy time as long as his fists were out from under him so he could suck on them. Another discovered that her baby was just fine on his tummy — as long as he was bare-butt!

**Tip:** See if your baby likes to be massaged while he's on his tummy. If he does, it could help him feel comfortable in that position.