

Activities to Help You Position, Carry, Hold and Play with Your Baby

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Tummy Time Tools provides parents with ideas and activities to make sure your baby gets enough time on his tummy throughout the day, while he is awake and supervised. These activities include handling, carrying, diapering, positioning, feeding and playing with your baby. Increasing the amount of time your baby lies on his tummy:

- Promotes muscle development in the neck and shoulders
- Helps prevent tight neck muscles and the development of flat areas on the back of the baby's head
- Helps build the muscles your baby needs to roll, sit and crawl

Why Do Babies Need Tummy Time?

Babies need tummy time because they are spending more and more time on their backs. In the early 90s, the American Academy of Pediatrics' Back to Sleep program successfully decreased the incidence of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) in the United States by 40 percent by encouraging parents to place their babies on their backs to sleep. Around the same time, a number of infant carriers that doubled as car seats and carriers became widely used. This combination of back sleeping at night and daytime pressure on the infant's head can create a flattening of the skull. When a baby develops flat areas on the back of the head and possibly the forehead, it's called plagiocephaly. Often, this flattening is made worse by a condition called torticollis.

Torticollis is a single muscle or group of muscles that are tight or weak on one side of the neck, causing a baby to tilt or turn to one side. The muscle fibers can shorten because of continued resting in one position. It is very important that an infant be placed on his back to sleep. However, it is also important to a baby's development that he get supervised tummy time and constant repositioning throughout the day.

The activities in *Tummy Time Tools* increase your cuddle time and contact with your baby and will enhance the time you spend together. Teach these activities to family members and other caretakers, so the activities become an important part of your baby's day.

Tummy Time Is:

- Any activity that keeps your baby from lying flat in one position against a hard, supporting surface
- Anytime you carry, position or play with your baby while he is on his belly
- Beneficial to babies of all ages
- Fun, and it can be designed to be easy or challenging for your baby
- Adaptable, and changes as your baby grows and develops strength
- Always supervised—never leave your baby alone on his tummy
- A great time to bond with your baby
- More enjoyable when you play music or give your baby interesting toys to look at and play with

Carrying



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Carrying

- 1.** Alternate the hip your baby straddles to encourage looking, turning and balancing (to the right and left sides) in both directions.
- 2.** Carry your baby over your shoulder. Gently support his head in a centered position. By changing the shoulder your baby is carried on, you will encourage your baby to turn to both sides. Less support is needed as your baby develops strength, as well as head and trunk control.
- 3.** Hold your baby out in front and facing away from you. Gently keep his head centered.
- 4.** Carry your baby belly down, with your arm supporting underneath his chest. Younger infants will need their heads and chest supported, but as your baby gains strength in the neck and trunk muscles, less support is needed.
- 5.** As your baby develops strength, 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 to encourage him to watch the activities in the room by turning his head.
- 7.** Carry your baby facing away from you on his right side. Switch and carry the baby on his left side.

Postions for Play



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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 will encourage your baby to lift his head to look at you. Gently turn the baby's head to both sides. As your baby grows, less support is needed, and your baby will begin to keep his head centered and push up on his arms.
- 2.** Place a pillow, small towel or blanket under the baby's chest to help your baby lift and center his head.
- 3.** Play on the floor with your baby. Place toys on both sides to encourage turning of the baby's head and reaching with both hands. (By playing with your baby, you can encourage socialization/interactions with mom, dad, brothers, sisters and grandparents.)
- 4.** Place 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.

Snuggle Time



Dressing and Bathing



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Snuggle Time

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

Dressing and Bathing

Incorporate the lifting, carrying and positioning ideas found in *Tummy Time Tools* while you dress and bathe your baby. This increases the opportunities for tummy time and turns dressing into a fun exercise.

- 1.** Towel dry and change your baby on his belly. Gently roll your baby from side to side as you apply shirt and pants.
- 2.** Massage your baby from head to toe after diapering and bathing.

Positioning



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3b

Positioning

- 1.** Adjust positioning so the baby can watch you with his head centered, rather than off to one side. Place the 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. The baby will re-center his body and gain strength.
- 2.** If your car seat comes equipped with a curved head support, center the baby's head within it. If your car seat does not already have a curved head support, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using a rolled blanket or towel, which can be placed along the side of the baby's head and shoulders while in the car seat, to keep the baby from leaning to one side and to position his head and body in the middle. (Do not place pads or cushions under or behind the baby while he is in the car seat.) Head supports can be purchased and installed for use in infant carriers and strollers only, not in car seats.
- 3.** Place fun and interesting mobiles or toys equally to both sides of your baby to encourage turning to both directions while on his tummy or back. Change the side your baby lies on, even if he prefers just one side.

Diapering



Sleeping



Diapering

- 1.** Alternate the position of your baby 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 encourages the head-centered position and eye contact with the caregiver.
- 3.** After diaper changes, roll your baby on his belly before picking him up. While supervised, allow the baby to play in this position for a few minutes.

Sleeping

- 1.** Position your baby on his back to sleep. Place your baby at the opposite end of the crib every other night. Keep a calendar by the crib to remind you to change the baby's direction.
- 2.** Turn the baby's head to the opposite side each night to keep it from developing flat spots.

Feeding



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Feeding

1. Change the arm you hold your baby in for feeding, so the baby begins to look and turn equally 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 to both sides.

2. Sit with your back supported and knees bent. Position your baby against your legs, facing you. Feed your baby with the head positioned in the middle. (Keep your baby's head centered during the feeding.)

3. Try placing your baby belly down over your lap when burping. This is a way to introduce tummy time to a young infant.

4. Position the baby's infant seat so he turns and looks to both sides. Spoon-feed your baby with the spoon coming in from the middle, left and right to encourage turning of the head to both sides and use of the small muscles around the lips and mouth to strengthen both sides.

More Activities



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More Activities

- 1.** Sit your baby on your lap, facing you. Provide support as needed, and encourage the baby to hold his head up and centered. Turn his head equally to both sides. Again, a good position for feeding.
- 2.** Lie on the floor with your baby, face-to-face. Help your baby push up on his elbows to lift his head to look at you.
- 3.** Provide support under the chest to make lifting the head in the middle easier.
- 4.** Place toys in front of your baby while he is lying on his belly to encourage reaching and playing with both hands. Your baby may begin propping up on both arms and moving around the floor on his belly. Your baby may also begin to crawl from this position.
- 5.** While watching TV or visiting with friends, place your baby on his tummy over your lap. Change the baby's position to encourage looking to both sides.

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