

TUMMY TIME AND YOUR BABY'S DEVELOPMENT

Your pediatrician has told you why it is important for your infant not to be put to sleep on his or her tummy. This does not mean that your baby should never be placed on his tummy. Putting your baby on his tummy while awake is very important for development in a number of ways. Today's baby spends a lot of time in a car seat, an infant carrier, or a bouncy seat and is missing out on important **Tummy Time**.

Statistics show that if an infant spends 15 minutes or less on tummy time every day, then by 6 months of age, the child will be 25% delayed in developmental skills.

We are seeing an increase in delayed motor skills as well as infants diagnosed with Torticollis due to the "back to sleep" campaign and increased use of positioning equipment (bouncy seats, vibrating seats, car seats, swings, exersaucers and walkers)

** Exersaucers and walkers have a double negative impact on infant development. They are marketed to parents as helping children learn to stand up and walk. However, the infant is placed in a semi-reclined position with their hips placed in a seated position. This is NOT the position children learn how to walk in. As well, the infant spends time in an extended knee and toes pointed (plantarflexed) position which does promote the negative response of Toe Walking.

Newborns lack the head and neck control to keep their head in midline while lying on their backs. Therefore, with all the hours spent sleeping, they can keep their heads to one side or the other. This can contribute to increased risk for torticollis* and plagiocephaly*. If the infant is awake, he should be on the floor, not in bouncy seats, which also promote head turning to one side or another.

Torticollis: A condition in which one side of an infant's neck musculature is shortened usually due to intrauterine positioning or constantly keeping his head turned the same way when sleeping or on his back. Conservative treatment involves stretching, physical therapy, and TOT collars.

Plagiocephaly: A condition in which an infant's skull is flattened on one side due to positioning. Conservative treatment involves wearing an orthotic helmet 23 hours a day.

Tummy Time...

- Helps baby develop and strengthen neck, back, arm, and chest muscles in preparation for holding her head up, for rolling over, for crawling, and for getting in and out of sitting.
- Helps develop eye muscles as baby gazes at objects in front of and around him and helps to coordinate eye movements with head movements.
- Provides very important sensory development to cheek, chin, and mouth by rubbing her face against the blanket or pad on the floor.
- Provides very important sensory input to palms of hands, wrists, and arms as baby bears weight on hands/arms.
- Encourages baby to reach for toys placed in front and to the side.
- Strengthens abdominal and chest muscles for deeper breathing and better air exchange in the lungs.
- Encourages the development of lip sounds m, b, p.
- Stimulates the inner ear and balance mechanisms.
- Enables baby to be comfortable on his belly from the start.

Every day be sure to give your baby the opportunity to experience **Tummy Time**.

In order to make **Tummy Time** safe and fun for your baby:

- Place your new infant chest to chest on you as you recline in your easy chair/couch.
- Lay down on the floor with your baby so you are side by side or face to face. Baby will enjoy looking at and exploring your face. You can also place baby on your bed or couch and sit in front of their face to be eye to eye. Try placing a small roll under their chest so they can have a little more support.
- Place colorful or musical toys in front of your baby as motivation to lift his head up and to see the world from this different perspective.
- Hold a mirror in front of baby so he can see that beautiful little person looking back.
- Roll up a small towel and place it under baby's chest and armpits with baby's arms on either side of her head to make it more comfortable at first. You can also place your hand on their bottom with firm pressure to "anchor" the baby more. Baby's head is much heavier than its lower body.
- Provide **Tummy Time** in small intervals of 5-10 minutes so baby does not get tired or frustrated. Provide this experience at least two times each day. The best time is when baby is alert and well rested. You may want to avoid doing it right after a feeding to avoid spitting up.

Remember that **Tummy Time** should be done only when your infant is awake and you are with him/her. *Never* place baby on his/her tummy on a bed or quilt or other soft surface where suffocation might occur. Always place baby on a firm surface-the floor or your chest. Discuss **Tummy Time** with your home visitor if you have any questions.