



TUMMY TIME

Overcoming Gravity

Babies come from a warm, floating environment, free from the force of gravity. Gravity is strong and powerful. We need to help babies feel comfortable experiencing the weight of gravity from both on their backs and on their stomachs. Beginning tummy time from day one helps to normalize the weight and experience of gravity, and therefore make it more enjoyable. Babies may not initially enjoy tummy time. Think of the “work out” they are doing, feeling sensations and using muscles they’ve never used before! It is critical that we continue this position, even if there is crying. When doing tummy time, always make sure that the baby’s nose and mouth are free to breath. Begin tummy time on a firm surface, avoiding padded or elevated surfaces. Be sure to engage your baby during tummy time, making the interaction with you rewarding, by talking, singing, providing toys to reach for. Remember, you cannot over do tummy time!

Why is Tummy Time Important?

- ▶ It helps **develop the muscles** of neck and back that help lift and function against gravity.
- ▶ Pushing up on forearms, straight arms and hands helps develop the muscles of the scapulas, shoulders arms and hands, needed for **fine motor skills**.
- ▶ Resting the head on each cheek, lifting the head and turning the head from tummy time helps allows the head to experience gravity from different positions. This helps develop the vestibular system, which is critical for **self-regulation, balance, posture**, exploring movement, and knowing where the body is in space.
- ▶ Being on the stomach helps to **develop the visual system**. It helps bring vision out further into the environment and helps with goal directed movement. It develops the muscles of the eyes while working against gravity.
- ▶ It is the precursor to movement and development of **motor milestones**, including rolling, crawling, even sitting.
- ▶ It helps develop intrinsic **motivation**, or the child’s internal desire to move, play and accomplish goals.
- ▶ Bones develop and strengthen based on bearing weight. Tummy time helps prevent flattening of skull (plagiocephaly) and **strengthens bones**.
- ▶ It allows for exploration of the environment, **developing the sensory systems**.
- ▶ Lifting and pushing up against gravity helps to develop the shape and function of the esophagus, neck and face muscles, and bones of the face, which will help **develop feeding skills**.

Make it a part of your routine.

- ▶ After diaper changes
- ▶ After changing clothes
- ▶ Playtime
- ▶ Snuggle time

Progression

- ▶ Lifts head and turns it side to side.
- ▶ Lifts shoulders off the surface.
- ▶ Props on elbows and looks around.
- ▶ Pushes up on elbows and hands.
- ▶ Does “mini-push ups”, lifting up higher using arms, neck, back and core muscles.
- ▶ Fully extended arms with core off floor.
- ▶ Supports self on hands and knees.
- ▶ Rocking back and forth, using arms to pivot and “move”.

Tummy Time Positions and Tips

- ▶ Hold your baby chest to chest. You can do this from seated, which is easiest for them. Slowly recline yourself to increase the difficulty, until you are laying down on your back and they are fully doing tummy time on your chest.
- ▶ Use a C pillow or towel roll under their breastbone and arms to help lift them and fight the full force of gravity. When they are bigger, you can even use your thigh.
- ▶ Lay them over your lap. Touching you provides comfort and sometimes small bouncing can be calming.
- ▶ Position their arms so the elbows are bent, in by their chest, ready to begin pushing up onto the forearms.
- ▶ Encourage laying peacefully with the cheek resting on the surface. Lay next to them and sing. Do each side.
- ▶ Engage the visual system by having the child look at you or a toy. Try moving slowly to have their vision follow you, side to side, up and down, near and far.
- ▶ Apply slight pressure with your hand on their top diaper line, down toward the surface and their feet. This helps to shift their gravity center and make it easier to raise up.
- ▶ Use your hand at top of the diaper to gently jiggle side to side. This can be calming and increase their comfort level.

Do not let crying stop you.

Build up endurance. Start with short amounts of time, frequently. Vary the position. Provide comfort and reassurance, but do not rescue.

Red Flags

- ▶ Resting with most of weight on breastbone, not belly button
- ▶ Does not use forearms or hands to push up
- ▶ Head is “stuck” tilted with ear toward chin
- ▶ Only turning head to one side
- ▶ Resting chin or forehead on the surface, not on a cheek
- ▶ Excessive arching of the back
- ▶ Hands remain tightly fist