

Why is “Tummy Time” Important?

In 1994, the American Academy of Pediatrics’ “Back to Sleep Campaign” was initiated in the United States to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). However, this scare of SIDS has caused many infants to not get enough “tummy time.” The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends, and continues to recommend, babies to sleep on their backs. Therefore, infants are spending about twelve hours a day sleeping on their backs. The AAP now recommends “Tummy to Play”, but there seems to be confusion about how much time an infant should be on their stomach. The truth is that an infant should be on their stomach as much as possible when awake.

Tummy time is essential because it helps infants:

- Stretch and promote muscle development in the neck, shoulders, back and leg muscles.
- Be in a functional position to learn important motor skills, such as, rolling over, pushing up onto their hands and knees, sitting up, crawling, and pulling to stand.
- Help prevent tight neck muscles and develop normally-shaped heads.
- Develop their sensory-perceptual, social-emotional, problem solving, balance, visual, and hearing abilities.

How can you as a parent, make sure your infants get enough “Tummy Time” when he/she is awake?

The way to ensure an infant gets enough tummy time is to start when he/she is a newborn. Some get fussy when they are first put on his/her tummies because this is something he/she is not use to, and it is hard for the infant to hold his/her head up. However, an infant will begin to tolerate it for a longer duration each time he/she is placed on his/her stomach. Therefore, if you start early (from even a few days old) and maintain a consistent schedule, your child will begin to love tummy time.

Some Helpful Tips:

1. Make sure your infant’s sitter or daycare provider knows about the importance of tummy time.
2. Make sure your infant is not tired or hungry when you place him/her tummy down. Also, not on a full stomach, as this might be uncomfortable.
3. When your infant begins to cry during tummy time, try to coax him/her to tolerate it a bit longer by talking or playing with him/her. Remember your baby’s tolerance to tummy time will increase with practice and a bit of coaxing.
4. Your baby will be more content on his/her tummy when he/she is able to hold his/her head up and is able to roll over.
5. Stay in tune with your baby to see if there is something that makes tummy time uncomfortable for him/her. Check to see if the blanket scrunched under him/her or if the surface he/she is on is too cold.