

PTLC's Tummy Time Tips

What is tummy time, and why is it important?

Tummy time refers to the time your baby spends on their stomachs while awake and supervised. It is critical to development for several reasons. Tummy time:

- Develops the muscles of the head, neck, core, and eyes
- Prevents flattening of the skull that can result from too much time on the back
- Can prevent torticollis, a condition in which the neck muscles on one side of the head are shortened, resulting in a baby's head tilting and/or turning to one side.
- Promotes development of the visual and vestibular systems



When should a baby start tummy time?

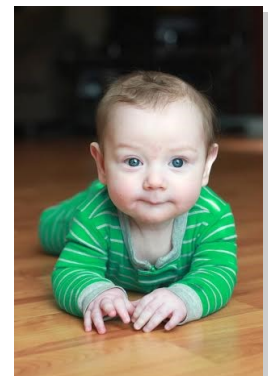
Babies should be given tummy time from day ONE after birth! It is never too early. Tummy time can be accomplished in many ways besides placing your baby on the floor; even placing your baby on your chest while you are in a reclined position counts.



My baby doesn't like tummy time...how can we make this easier?

Many babies dislike tummy time at first, because it is hard for them to move in that position while they don't have good head control. However, more frequent tummy time will typically lead to quick development of adequate head control, leading to a much more pleasant tummy time experience faster! In the meantime, here are a few tips and tricks:

- Hold your baby on your chest while reclined whenever possible; the close physical contact and ability to look at your face will likely increase tolerance for this position.
- If your baby has reflux, avoid tummy time right after meals; try to wait 30 minutes to an hour after feeding to avoid pressure on the stomach that can aggravate reflux symptoms.
- Carry your baby from room to room positioned on their tummy over your arms, or burp your baby face down on your lap; both count as "tummy time" because the baby has to work against gravity to lift their head.
- Engage your baby face to face for tummy time if possible, meaning get on the floor with your baby or do tummy time on an elevated surface so it is easier for both of you to have eye contact. Babies love faces!
- Try tummy time over an exercise ball; many babies love the addition of bouncing and rocking.
- For tummy time on the floor, place a mirror or interesting toys to the sides of the baby; it is often too hard at first if you place objects directly in front of them, but most babies can hold their head up better with their necks turned to look at something placed at their side when first gaining control.



How frequently should we do tummy time?

There are no set “formulas” for how much time is enough, but *as long as your baby can tolerate, as frequently during the day* is ideal. Years ago, before placing babies on their backs to sleep was the norm, babies spent most of the day in the tummy down position whether sleeping or awake. Your baby’s tolerance for tummy time will increase with age and as they gain skill. A good rule of thumb is to put your baby on the floor on their tummy as opposed to placing them in a “container” (like a bouncy seat, jumperoo, etc.) when your baby is awake and you can supervise. This may mean that at first, your baby does very short periods of tummy time multiple times during the day until they build up the time they are able to tolerate in this position. Babies need LOTS of practice lifting their heads and moving their muscles against gravity for ideal motor development, and they have to work those muscles harder when they are on the floor as opposed to being supported on their backs.



See the following links for more good information on tummy time:

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Tummy Time Tools: A comprehensive handout on tummy time with multiple tips to incorporate tummy time in your daily routine.

http://www.choa.org/Patients-Families/New-Parents/~/_media/CHOA/Documents/Services/Orthopaedics/O-and-P/Tummy-Time-Tools-update-2014.pdf

Pathways.org: A great website for information on infant development, including multiple tummy time resources with videos.

<https://pathways.org/growth-development/tummy-time/>