

LEAPS

learning eating active play sleep



Tummy Time



Tummy time refers to the time a baby spends on their stomach while they are awake and supervised. Tummy time should make up a major part of baby's floor play. The Safe Infant Care guidelines recommend **'Back to sleep, tummy to play and sit up to watch the world'**.

Tummy time should be encouraged immediately from birth, for instance with a newborn lying skin-to-skin on a parent's chest. Onwards from here, tummy time should be implemented in small, frequent

amounts throughout the day, and slowly increased as time progresses. This tummy time can start simply at one or two minute intervals at a time; gradually increase tummy time as the baby feels comfortable. It is best to encourage tummy time while your baby is calm and relaxed. Be sure to respect baby's response to tummy time – if not responding well, please do not push it, as you do not want to associate these new experiences with feeling stressed.

Benefits

There are many benefits of a baby participating in tummy time, which include:

- Encourages baby to gain head and body control - developing head control allows a baby to visually explore the environment.
- Assists with the development of the baby's skull – as a newborn baby's skull is still quite soft and constantly lying on its back without changing head position can cause a flattened effect on the back of baby's head.
- Strengthens neck, shoulders, arms and torso muscles – this strength will prepare the baby for crawling as well as getting ready to push up, roll over and eventually stand.
- Encourages baby's motor skills- e.g. balancing on one arm to reach for toys.

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How to encourage tummy time

Some babies really enjoy playing on their tummies, and may actually prefer this to being on their back. However, there are many babies who actually dislike being on their tummy; they require a little more encouragement.

Some ways in which tummy time can be encouraged can include:

- Place baby on a firm surface on his or her tummy, with arms forward.
- Participate in short but frequent periods of play, this will allow baby to gradually build up its strength and learn to move more efficiently.
- Lie down on the floor facing baby and talk or sing to baby.
- Hold a rattle or squeaky toy, wave a colourful silky scarf or place a mirror in front of baby to look at.
- While you are lying on your back or reclining, lay baby on your tummy so that baby will be encouraged to lift up and look at your face.
- Place a ball or similar round toy within baby's reach.
- Lie baby on different textures – e.g. lambskin, canvas, satin or fleecy fabrics.
- If baby can't support its weight on their forearms, support baby on a rolled up towel placed beneath its arms, with arms forward, over the top of the towel.

How much tummy time do babies need?

For infants that have not started rolling or crawling, aim to provide a period of tummy time in each feed/sleep/play cycle. Depending on the child, it is often best to do so before a feed as babies often find this more comfortable and they are less likely to regurgitate. However, some children awake immediately hungry and therefore tummy time is best after food, and a short interval to allow digestion to commence.

Infants who are rolling and crawling will often create their own tummy time opportunities that suit them. Try to encourage a tummy time opportunity at each 'play' interval in the day's (daylight hours) routine.

As long as tummy time is supervised and guided by the infant, you can't really provide too much tummy time, as infants will naturally tire of the activity and indicate that to their carers. Some will need to build up gradually, whereas some will have the strength to last a long time and this is also perfectly fine as long as they are happy. The more time babies spend on their tummy, the earlier they may begin to roll over, crawl on their stomachs, crawl on all fours and sit without support. It is important to ensure that you never leave your baby unattended during tummy time.

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Links to the National Quality Standard (NQS) and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

NQS Quality Area 2:

Children's health
and safety

NQS Standard 2.2:

Healthy eating
and physical
activity are
embedded in the
program for
children

NQS Element 2.2.2:

Physical activity is
promoted through
planned and
spontaneous
experiences and is
appropriate for each
child

EYLF Learning

Outcome 3:

Children have a
strong sense of
wellbeing
*Children take
increasing
responsibility for
their own health*

References

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Raising Children Network. (2012). Tummy time. http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/pip_tummy_time.html

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