

# **The Importance of Tummy Time**

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With the increased push to put babies to sleep on their back, less time is being spent on the tummy, which has implications for later development. Achieving early gross motor milestones, such as rolling and crawling, depends on having strong muscles in the neck, trunk, and shoulders, which all develop during tummy time. Though it may be hard to tell, the wiggling and struggle that you see in your baby while on his or her tummy are setting the foundation for both maintaining positions and moving about.

Babies has an instinctive need and desire to explore their environment. Being on their tummy encourages them to lift their head against gravity. Once they can lift their head, they then work towards lifting their chest and pushing up through their arms. Once this foundational strength is developed, babies can start to problem solve ways to explore their surroundings further. Eventually they are likely to push up onto straight arms and then into positioning on hands and knees. Before you know it, they may be crawling. All of this was initiated by spending supervised time on their tummy.

It is easy to talk about the importance of tummy time and how it supports gross motor development, but what if you baby doesn't tolerate it? Well first, it is important to recognize that they may not tolerate it simply because it is hard. Think of tummy time as a gym session for your baby. While there are going to be struggles, there are ways to prevent frustration without abandoning the activity all together.

## **Tummy Time Tips**

- Start on day 1
- Do frequent, short sessions and gradually lengthen your sessions as your baby gets more comfortable
- Set up a regular schedule (such as after naps or diaper changes)
- Set yourself a goal each day (shoot for at least 5 tummy sessions per day)
- Distract your baby with a song, favorite toy, safe mirror, or by playing peek-a-boo
- Get down on the floor at eye level with your baby
- Place baby on tummy over a rolled blanket or Boppy pillow
- Recline on your back on a couch or chair and lay your baby on your stomach while singing and talking to him/her
- Use an exercise ball, by moving the ball backwards and forwards you can make it easier or harder

**If the above tips do not seem to help, please seek more specific advice and recommendations for your pediatrician or a pediatric physical therapist. Pediatric physical therapists are movement specialists with experience helping children achieve gross motor milestones.**