



The Importance of Tummy Time

What is Tummy Time?

Tummy time is simply the time your baby spends lying on his tummy as opposed to on his back. At least some of his time when awake should be spent in this position-perhaps a few minutes twice a day.

Why is it important?

Placing your baby on its back to sleep is very important in reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or cot death as it is also known. However, it is equally important that your baby goes on his tummy for regular periods while he is awake. Following the initial introduction of the 'Back to Sleep' Guidelines a whole generation of baby's missed out on the crawling stage as well meaning mothers and professionals did not place them on their tummy at all. 'Tummy time' is essential to allow your baby to develop important skills like learning to push up, roll over, sit up and crawl as well as developing the Head Righting Reflex. It allows him to develop and strengthen head, neck arms and back muscles as well as learn to see and reach for toys, to crawl and eventually feed himself. It will also ensure that your baby does not develop a flat head. Known as Plagiocephaly, this can occur if your baby spends too long on their back and their weight is on the same side of the head for long periods of time. This is a particular risk for premature babies.

What if my baby does not like being on his tummy?

Not all babies will enjoy being on their tummy. Initially it is difficult as they do not have the Head Righting Reflex in place so are unable to hold their head up - but they will not develop the Head Righting Reflex well if not placed on their tummy at all. Without this reflex, when baby is placed on his tummy all he can see is the ground. Initially you can lie down yourself and place your baby on your chest - in this position he will be able to see you so improving bonding as well as improving his tummy lying skills. As your baby gets older and the Head Righting Reflex improves (between 2-3 months) then you can start to place him on his tummy on the floor. Do this at least once daily and ALWAYS supervise your baby during this time. Initially your baby may be upset at being put on his front on the floor-this is due to the different visual orientations he will have from being upright or on his back but be persistent.

There are no set rules for how long to leave baby on his tummy-just use your own judgment and knowledge of your baby. Try for 3-5 minutes initially and then increase gradually as he tolerates. If he does start to cry then do not pick him up immediately but try to give him a

few seconds/minutes before doing so and try to increase this period of time each time he is on his tummy. Providing things to look at and play with will also help-small favourite toys, a colourful play mat or a small baby safe mirror (sometimes incorporated in play mats) all help. As your baby grows and develops he will enjoy being on his tummy more and can be left for slightly longer periods.

While your baby is on his tummy get down there with him for at least some of the time. Having you there will occupy him will be a great treat for him but will also give you time to play and bond together. Plus, you will be able to watch him, learning about what he does, where he looks, how he moves and get to see the world from his perspective.

Encouraging your baby to lay on his tummy gives him the opportunity to learn about his body: how limbs and muscles move: what they can and cannot do: how he can control them etc. It also allows her to strengthen all the gross and fine muscles need over the next few developmental stages, as well as promote cognitive and social skills. As your baby develops, do things such as placing toys just how of reach to encourage her to reach for them so showing her how to begin crawling.

When do I stop putting my baby on his tummy?

You can keep putting your baby on his tummy for as long as you like but you will find that once he is able to roll he will roll himself in and out of the position. Try to encourage him to stay on his tummy a bit longer by giving him toys to play with or by getting down there with him and playing together.